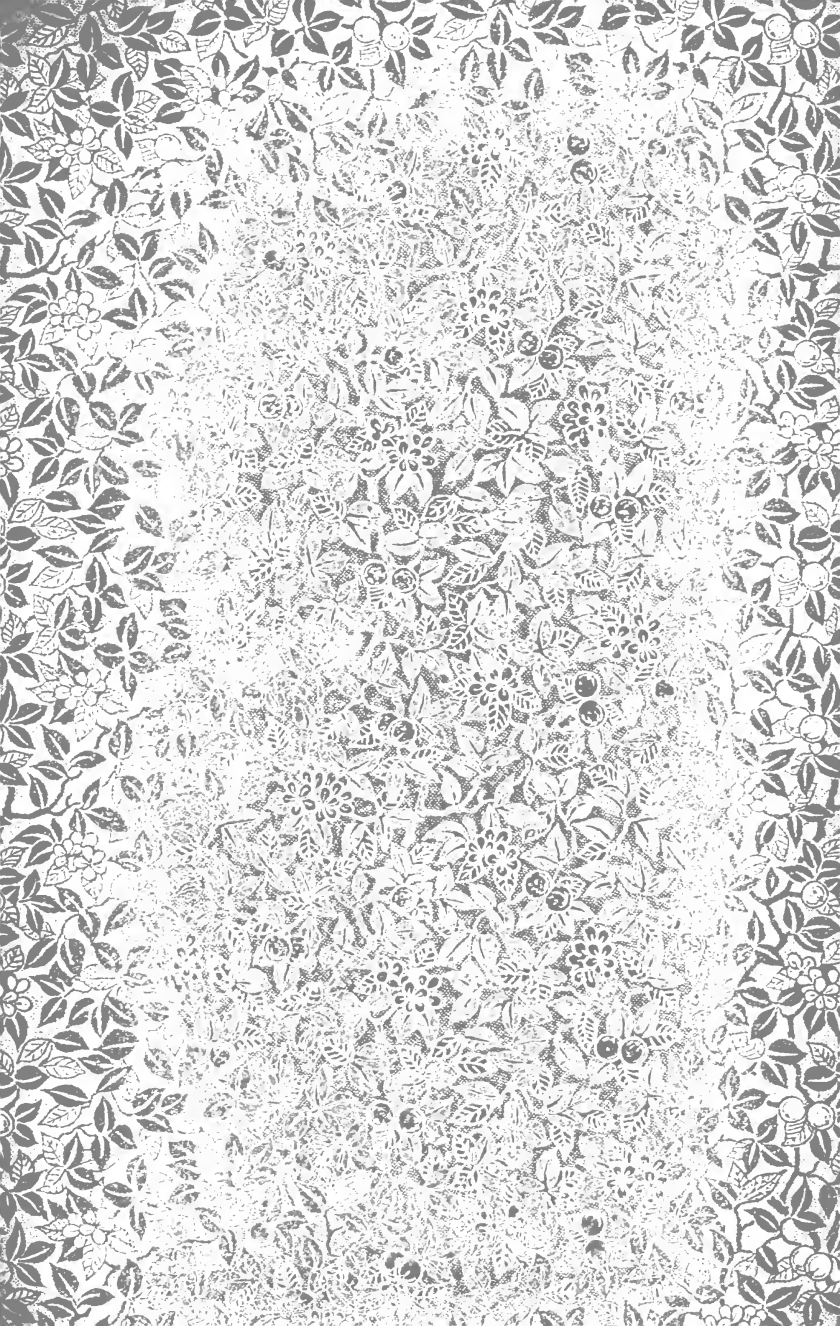


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BY

JAMES PAYN

AUTHOR OF 'LOST SIR MASSINGBERD' 'BY PROXY' 'HIGH SPIRITS'
'UNDER ONE ROOF' 'A GRAPE FROM A THORN' ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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KIT: A MEMORY.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

AT THE CROWN.

PROMPTNESS and energy will do much in this world, more perhaps than any other two practical virtues, but it is piteous to reflect how often they are wasted. We may put our shoulders to the wheel on the instant, and keep at it; we may not leave a stone unturned for the attainment of the desired object; yet it falls like ripe fruit into the lap of some one else who has hardly troubled himself to hold out his hand for it. What is less disappointing, but

equally flouts poor human endeavour, our object is sometimes attained by quite other methods.

None but Trenna herself knew what she suffered in saying what she did to Mark Medway, to persuade him to have nothing to do with her brother's venture ; that he should have pronounced her 'hard on Kit' was a proof how vehemently she had pleaded against her own instincts ; indeed, while she did so, a still, small voice which was not that of conscience—conscience was 'retained on the other side'—never ceased to whisper to her, 'Disloyal, disloyal !' She almost felt like an informer who betrays his confederate, though not for gain. It was by a desperate effort that she had persuaded herself to play the part she had done ; it was only by a dead lift that she had overcome Mark's objections, and made him promise to steer clear of Cook's Creek ; yet, as

it turned out, she might have spared all her pains. If heat and force can ever be spent in vain, so it was in her case.

The next day Kit came down to Mogadion to the Crown, where, under pretence of business preventing his going to the Knoll that evening, he got Mark to dine with him.

‘Why, how gay you look, Kit!’ were his friend’s first words. And indeed Kit’s appearance had undergone a considerable change. He had been wont to be very careless in his attire; whereas he was now dressed in the height of fashion, with a small but costly pin in his scarf and sparkling rings on his fingers. Yet he did not look at all like Mr. Archibald Martin: he was a man whom even finery could not vulgarise.

‘I am glad you think so, my dear Mark,’ he answered, with a smile brighter than his

jewels ; ‘I am, indeed, an Embodied Success—the living image of Prosperity ; and I am very willing to appear so. “If the manager is so flourishing the mine must flourish” is the deduction I wish the good folks hereabouts to make.’

Mark’s face fell at these words. ‘Of course you have been to Cook’s Creek, and think it all rubbish,’ Kit continued. ‘True, all that is to be seen there *is* rubbish, but not what is underneath it. My conviction is that it will be the greatest success of any mine in the West of England.’

Mark thought of Brabazon, with his ‘as sure as my name is Archibald Martin,’ and gave an involuntary sigh.

‘I see that is not your view, my dear Mark. Very good, time will show. In the meantime let us dine.’

Kit was not only gay but in boisterous spirits; but to Mark's thinking they were not his old spirits. He was altered in other ways besides his attire: his face had a more mature expression; his air and tone, though still natural and eager, were more those of a man of the world than of one in his 'hot youth,' and for Kit's sake, though not for his own—for there was nothing wanting in the way of cordiality and affection—Mark felt that he preferred, as painters say, his 'early manner.'

The dinner-table was set forth with the best that the inn could furnish, but Mark noticed that his friend drank nothing but champagne. He drank a great deal of it, and never ceased to talk. He spoke of their old school-days, of Mark's mother and Maud, of Trenna, of the Rector, and the Doctor. His

very omission to speak of Frank caused Mark, perhaps, to allude to him.

‘Meade wrote to us that he had seen you in London the other day.’

‘Ah! you mean some weeks ago. I was rather depressed just then, and I dare say gave him that impression. Things were not going so well as they do now.’

‘Indeed, he took a very cheerful view, Kit, and wrote of you most kindly.’

‘That was very good of him. He probably did so out of pity. Nothing amuses me more than the commiseration which your plodder so often exhibits towards men of impulse and energy. Nobody is so astonished as he when they achieve success.’

‘My dear Kit!’

‘Oh, I am not angry, Mark, I do assure you! but to be patronised by Frank Meade is a

little too much. I have not a word to say against him, mind. Indeed, since he is your friend, he would be safe from my shafts in any case ; but I confess his praises weary me. He has always been thrown at my head, and held up to me as a good example. The fact is, there is no more comparison between us than between a dog and a fish. We are not in the same plane.'

'Quite true, Kit: you are both, however, excellent fellows, each in your own way.'

'Thank you,' said Kit, drily ; it was plain he was deeply offended.

'I hope I have not annoyed you, Kit, by mentioning you and Frank together ; I did not, of course, imply equality as regards my own affection. You know that I have no friend on earth like you : one whom I love so much, or would do so much to serve.'

Here Mark stopped and coloured. Suppose that Kit should put him to the test by asking him to do the very thing that he had promised Trenna not to do !

‘I do believe it, Mark ; forgive my petulance: I am a very woman for jealousy. Perhaps, too, prosperity has spoilt me a little. You know I have never been accustomed to it.’

‘Nevertheless, my dear fellow,’ said Mark, smiling, ‘while contributing so much to the enjoyment of others, you have also enjoyed yourself pretty well, I think. It is something, surely, to be the favourite of every one.’

‘A plaything to be cast aside when it ceases to amuse. No, Mark, I prefer my present *rôle*—that of the favourite of fortune. Six months ago—nay, one month—I could never have supposed it possible that I should occupy a

position of such emolument and trust as I hold at present.'

'There is none so pleased as I, Kit, to hear you say so.'

'I am sure of that, Mark. The Braithwaites have behaved admirably to me; the old gentleman was coy at first, but I have overcome his objections, and he now sees how judicious was my advice; the shares of the mine are already nearly at par. This was a little tribute of acknowledgment the directors gave me.'

Kit took from his pocket a small shagreen box containing a diamond ring, and placed it in Mark's hand. It was a most splendid jewel, a rose diamond—that is to say, a hemisphere covered with facets—of large size and an intense brilliancy.

'Good Heavens, Kit! Why, this must have cost a fortune.'

‘I had not the indelicacy to inquire how much,’ answered Kit, smiling, ‘but I fancy that the price must have run to four figures. That is only an earnest, however, of what the Board will do for me if I succeed in furthering their interests. Money is plentiful enough with us; your offer of pecuniary help, if, through being so like yourself it had not reminded me of our life-long friendship, would have amused me; but of good names, and especially of good local names, we are still in need. That is, in fact, the chief reason of my presence here.’

Kit had risen from his seat, the dinner being concluded, and was pacing the room rapidly with a cigar in his mouth. Mark, smoking his huge meerschaum pipe, leant back in his chair, with his eyes fixed on his own boots. ‘Now, now,’ he thought to himself, Kit is surely about to ask me to allow my

name to be set down as one of his local committee. Trenna entreated me to keep her intervention a secret from him, and upon what ground can I possibly refuse the dear fellow?'

'As to you, Mark,' Kit continued, after a long pause, 'I remember, of course, that you were so good as to say that not only your purse but your name was at our disposal: there could be no sort of harm, but, on the contrary, great opportunities of profit, in your joining the directorate; but there would certainly be some degree of risk; and risk I would never ask you to incur on my account. Nay, don't tempt me,' for Mark had been about to speak, 'about that I am determined. To drag a friend into any commercial venture is worse than to compel a relative to employ one professionally. But though I don't wish for

your vote, I hope you will have no objection to give us your interest.'

'I don't quite understand,' murmured Mark; but secretly he had a strong suspicion that this proposition was worse than the other.

'Well, you can do us good in this way without compromising yourself in the least. You are a man whom everybody likes and respects. If any one asks you about the mine you may say with truth that for your part you know nothing about it; but that persons of whose intelligence you have a good opinion have spoken to you of its prospects in the highest terms. Now, there's your friend the General, for example. The three hundred a year which is given to every one on the Committee of Direction is a bait which, as I happen to know, is attracting him. If he applies to you, just say a good word for us.'

‘ You mean for the Cook’s Creek Mining Company ? ’ inquired Mark, looking up in great confusion.

‘ Well, yes, of course ; I venture to flatter myself that you would speak favourably of me individually, but, then, I don’t want to appear in the matter, because to an outsider—one who does not know me as you do—I must needs appear an interested party. Now, the General’s name, though he is as poor as a rat, would be a tower of strength to us ; for the public at large will not know that he *is* poor, whereas those who run may read—for his address will be printed big enough—that he lives at Moat Park, Mogadion. There is nothing like a local magnate.’

‘ My dear Kit, I can’t do it,’ said Mark, simply. ‘ The fact is—pray forgive me for speaking so plainly—I don’t believe in

the mine. You see, I've seen it,' he added naïvely.

'I don't ask you to believe in it ; I only ask you to say you believe in those connected with it.'

'In Mr. Brabazon, for instance ?' answered Mark, in desperation. 'My dear Kit, I can't do it.'

'Brabazon!' echoed Kit, with a light laugh ; 'so you have run that cunning fox to earth, have you ? And he imagined himself to be so cunning ! You thought it odd, no doubt, to find him under a new name, and employed in such very different work to that he was accustomed to at old Ludlow's. Well, so it *was* odd. But he had reasons of his own—five hundred of them—for changing his name. An uncle—one Mr. Martin—left a thousand pounds between him and his sister ; and as to

his change of calling, ushership is no inheritance, or even a livelihood. We give him five pounds a week and his expenses, and he thinks himself in clover.'

'I don't like him, Kit, and never did. I remember the time when you warned me against him as being an unprincipled fellow.'

'I was a purist then, my dear Mark. I now know we must take men as we find them.'

'But one need not make friends of such people,' answered Mark, gravely. 'The man spoke of you with a familiarity which, I must say, annoyed me exceedingly.'

'He did, did he?' said Kit, with a quick frown; 'that is like his impudence. He is a deuced impudent fellow, but he is a very serviceable instrument, and that is all the Company has to consider. Now let us have done with Cook's Creek. If it were full of

gold, instead of 'tin, it would not pay me for one jarring note in our friendship. We will agree to differ upon that matter till time shows which of us is right.'

Then, without another allusion to the topic, nor (which was a great relief to Mark) to the General, the two friends fell to talking of old times. Even in this it was curious to see from what a different standpoint each regarded the life which they had left behind them. Mark recalled it with enthusiasm; dwelt with delight on this and that adventure; spoke of this and that companion with kindness and fervour, and became, as it were, a boy again. Kit, on the other hand, regarded his past not merely as a something from which he had cut his cable and parted, but *ab extrâ*—as though it had been the life of another man. He spoke of even his own part in that played-out drama with

cynicism, and of the play itself as if it had not been worth the footlights. Only, when Mark alluded to such incidents as illustrated their boyish friendship, and proved (as many did) how closely they had been knit together, his eyes softened, his lips wore their brightest smile, and across his keen and eager features there flashed for an instant, like a reflection across a mirror, a likeness of the boy.

They parted at a late hour, with a long and earnest hand-shake. ‘To-morrow you will see me at the Knoll,’ said Kit. ‘My love to Trenna and your dear mother, and’—there was a moment’s hesitation; he had never sent his love to her before—‘and to Maud.’

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AN AUDACIOUS PROPOSITION.

MARK was far too loyal a friend, and, indeed, in any case, had too kind a heart to mention to others the doubts he had expressed to Kit respecting the Cook's Creek affair. But he told his people at the Knoll in what high spirits Kit himself was about it, and in particular how highly the Company thought of his services, with a most glowing description of the diamond ring. To Trenna's private questioning he replied, with truth, that in his opinion her brother had a genuine belief in the success of the mine.

It was on Trenna's lips to say, 'Ah, how little you know him!' but she had already gone far enough in decrying Kit, if not too far. Indeed, when Mark told her that her brother had not only made no demand on his purse, but had declined, upon the ground of 'risk,' even to ask him for the loan of his name as a contribution to the new enterprise, her conscience pricked her. 'I ought to have known, whatever were his own illusions,' she said, 'that Kit would never have led you into danger.'

About the General and Mr. Brabazon Mark said nothing, even to Trenna, so that she was really somewhat reassured, while Mrs. Medway received Kit with the most cordial congratulations, as one who was taking fortune at the flood

'It is such a pleasure to us all to see you

back again, dear Kit,' said Maud, 'and especially under such prosperous circumstances.'

To other ears that phrase 'to us all' would have sounded ill as regarded his prospects as a suitor, but Kit had an immense reliance upon his own powers of persuasion, nor did he sufficiently estimate the effect of absence upon personal influence; while as to any rival he was ignorant of his existence. He imagined Maud to be just as he left her on that day of her rescue from the river—a curious mistake for a man of such intelligence to make, but scarcely to be wondered at when, every day, we see folks, otherwise clever enough, but who give way to fits of passion, expecting to see others as pliant and amenable as usual within five minutes of their having been anathematised and 'flown at.'

To be welcomed by so many loving hearts,

after his lonely life in London, seemed to them to touch Kit to the quick, but the sense of contrast in other respects was stronger, perhaps, than they imagined. The Medways, indeed, had a notion, which he did not discourage, that most of his time had been spent with the Braithwaites, in scenes of great wealth and luxury, concerning which Maud would rally him, pretending that this and that which had once contented him at the Knoll now palled upon his pampered taste; whereas the fact was he was so full of thought that matters which had formerly given him pleasure were now unnoticed. And this, too, if he had not been so self-confident, would have aroused his doubts of her, for it is not the manner of young ladies, when welcoming after long absence the man they love, to indulge in raillery. He took it, however, all in good part save once when Maud

referred to the diamond ring which, in addition to the 'purse of ten thousand sequins,' as she termed his salary, the genii of the mine had bestowed on him.

'That ring is a private affair,' he said, 'which Mark should have told you nothing about.'

'But you'll show it to us,' said Maud (again using the plural where, had she loved him, she would have used the singular); but he had declined to do so, and even with some abruptness.

'Why did you not show Maud the ring?' inquired Trenna of her brother, when they were alone together.

'Because it would have been a breach of confidence,' he answered curtly; 'I ought not to have shown it to Mark.'

'But he said it was such a very handsome

ring,' urged 'Trenna, with some anxiety. 'Was it a *douceur* from the Directors, or what?'

'Well, not exactly; it was by way of secret service money; *you* shall see it, of course, but I don't want any fuss made about it.' But he never showed Trenna the ring.

In other respects he talked to her about the Cook's Creek enterprise with great apparent frankness.

'As you have seen the mine,' he said, 'of course you don't believe in it, and it is plain that even Mark does not. I can't help that. It is neither you nor he whom we wish to convince. Our engineer reports well of it; it certainly used to be a good mine, and his notion is that it was never properly worked. It's a chance, of course, but in my opinion it's a good chance. Men like Braithwaite don't put their money into a stocking, much more

into a hole in the ground. The shares are steadily rising. Still, what we are in want of is local support. It has rather a "fishy" look when among all the names of the subscribers to the undertaking there is nobody who lives within a hundred miles of the place. There is nothing really in it, for, as no one is a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*, so no place is held in much esteem by its next-door neighbour, but if possible this hiatus must be filled up. As Mark positively declines to use his influence, I have no means of getting at the old General.'

'Did you ask Mark to invite the General?' inquired Trenna, with a horror in her tone which showed that all her brother's eloquence had failed to paint the Cook's Creek enterprise in rose colour.

'Yes; did he not tell you so?'

'Not a word.'

‘Nor about Brabazon neither?’

She shook her head. ‘I know about that,’ she said gravely.

‘What a noble fellow Mark is,’ mused Kit.

‘Yes, indeed; but why with a friend like him, and therefore knowing what a friend *should* be, do you make a friend of Brabazon? He is a man who presumes upon it, I do assure you.’

‘What, to *you*?’ cried Kit, starting to his feet.

‘Yes, to *me*. ‘He chose to take it for granted that I was in league with you and him, acquainted with all the intrigues and deceptions you are compelled to practise.’

‘Oh, that was all, was it; that’s his way. He’s a coarse vulgar brute, but not ill-meaning. And now to speak of another subject, though hardly a more pleasant one. Is it really true

that our father that was has left Mogadion for good and all?’

‘I believe so, though no one knows exactly. The day after I left him——’

‘You mean the day after he turned you out of doors,’ put in Kit, drily.

‘Well, the day after that, he was never, for certain, seen again. There was a report that he was met at Plymouth, but I could never bring it home to any particular person. But it is positive that he discharged his servants on the same day that he discharged me, and passed the next night in the Grey House by himself. In the morning the place was found shut up, the doors locked, and the shutters closed, and so things have remained ever since.’

‘It’s curious,’ observed Kit, thoughtfully. ‘My own impression is that he has put that

notion of which he spoke into execution, and gone to spend the rest of his days in Spain ; in that case the house is ours, or can be treated as such, till the lease is up, which will be a twelvemonth hence. On the other hand the whole thing may be a trap.'

'A trap? What for?' inquired Trenna, nervously.

'To catch your humble servant. Having passed his word to you not to molest me concerning a certain matter, he may have repented of his clemency. "I'll not prosecute the dog," he may have said to himself (and I can imagine him saying it), "for *that*, but if he puts himself in my power again I will pay off old scores." If I took advantage, for instance, of his apparently having left the Grey House for good to dispose of the furniture, he might be down upon me like a shot.'

‘Oh, Kit, what a horrid notion!’

‘Gad, he’s quite capable of it—quite as capable, I should say, as of leaving his furniture—though, to be sure, it’s not worth much—to rack and ruin, instead of selling it for what it would fetch.’

‘I think you are mistaken there,’ said Trenna, gravely. ‘If you had seen him, as I saw him, that dreadful Christmas morning, you would be convinced that profit and loss are not in his mind. Such ideas were overmastered and obliterated by stronger emotions.’

‘He must have been moved indeed, then,’ remarked Kit, sardonically.

‘He *was* moved. Never did I see a human being so overcome with passion. It was a terrible sight, Kit,’ she added with a shiver, ‘and a terrible time.’

‘No doubt, no doubt, my darling,’ he

answered caressingly; ‘and you endured it for my sake. I shall never forget that. Still, as it has been undergone, one may as well get what good one can out of it.’

‘You shall never sell that furniture, Kit,’ exclaimed Trenna, vehemently.

‘The furniture? Pooh, rubbish! Do you suppose I am in want of a beggarly hundred pounds?’

‘I did not understand you had so much money in hand,’ said Trenna, regarding him very earnestly. ‘You only spoke of your salary and your expectations, and I don’t suppose you would like to sell that beautiful ring?’

‘The ring! Of course not,’ he answered impatiently. ‘Why the deuce do you keep harping on the ring? I don’t know about having “so much money”; but I have plenty

to go on with till next pay day. At all events, you need not fear my running the risk of putting my head in the tiger's mouth for the sake of a few sticks and carpets. On the other hand, if the Governor has really cleared out, the circumstance may be of the greatest use to me.' Here he paused, as if in thought; then added, 'What do you say to coming with me this afternoon and taking a look at the old place?'

'You don't mean *inside*, Kit?' answered Trenna, in horrified accents.

'Of course I do. You don't suppose he's there, do you?'

'No; at least, I am not sure. Oh, Kit, will it be safe?'

'Safe! He can't bite one if he *is* there, and there can surely be no harm in a son's looking over his father's house.'

‘But he is no longer our father. He said so, and he meant it.’

‘No doubt; but nobody but ourselves will believe that. We were the only people who had the pleasure of his intimate acquaintance, you see.’

‘Oh, Kit, how can you jest on such a matter? Is no subject sacred to you?’

‘Sacred! Do you call the man who has disowned his own flesh and blood sacred? Bah!’

‘But the horror of it, the terror of it, Kit! You have not suffered what I have suffered. You didn’t see him, you didn’t hear him.’

‘That’s true; no doubt it was very unpleasant. Well, you shan’t be frightened, my darling, even by a shadow. I’ll go to the Grey House by myself. I shall start early this afternoon while the light lasts.’

‘Very good. If you must, you must, and

it's better to get it over. But you shall not go alone, Kit ; I will go with you.'

'I should, of course, prefer that, if you don't mind,' he answered gently ; 'because it is better there should be a witness.'

'What for ?' inquired Trenna, nervously.
'What of ?'

'Well, of my breaking into the house, of course ; though there will be no difficulty in that way.' She did not seem to hear him ; her face was very pale, her eyes were full of a vague fear. 'What time will you be going ?'

'Immediately after lunch.'

'Lunch ?' It seemed amazing that he should talk of such a thing as lunch with such a visit in prospect.

'Well, in other words, at half past one. Will that suit you ?'

'I will be ready.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TENANTLESS.

ALTHOUGH, as Kit had argued, there could be nothing at the Grey House 'to bite' them, there was certainly something repellent, if not menacing, in the aspect of their former home, as the brother and sister beheld it on that wintry day. It had never been an attractive house, even in life—that is, when it had human tenants—but in death it looked forbidding, and even ghastly. Every one knows the verses in which the Laureate has typified a corpse by an empty house—

All within is dark and night,
In the windows is no light,
Nor any murmur at the door,
So frequent on its hinge before.
Close the door, the shutter close,
Or through the windows we shall see
The nakedness and vacancy
Of the dark, deserted house.

The windows and doors of the Grey House had been closed by the hand of the owner ; and by that act, it would seem, he had forbidden others to enter, yet these two were come to spy out its nakedness. Trenna trembled as the garden gate clattered behind them, and they crossed the lawn, strewn with sticks and leaves, to the front door.

‘ Is it really necessary to go in, Kit ? ’ she whispered ; ‘ you know best, but——’

‘ I do, my darling,’ he put in quickly ; ‘ it is absolutely necessary that I should see with my own eyes that he is gone.’

She answered nothing, but what her pale

face and frightened eyes said was, ‘ But suppose you should see with your own eyes that he is *not* gone ? ’

In physical dangers, and in the face of moral difficulties, Trena had the courage of a lion ; but there was to her mind something of sacrilege in what they were about to do. It was just possible, too, she thought, that on the morrow of that dreadful day of parting her father’s resolution to leave England might have failed him ; that he might have given way to reflections on his own desolate and forlorn condition, and, finding himself in that melancholy house alone, he might there and then have put an end to his existence. As they stood under his blinded window she whispered to her brother her fears of what he might have done.

‘ I don’t think it’s at all likely, Tren,’ he

answered gravely. 'But, even so, it is better to know the truth.'

Then she understood that the same idea had actually been in her brother's mind that had been in her own; nay, was there still. He, like her, thought it possible that somewhere in that dark, deserted house might lie, or hang——

The apprehension was so terrible that she did not trust herself to dwell on it, but hurriedly inquired of Kit whether the blacksmith had not better be sent for to help them get into the house.

'No, no,' he said; 'let us wash our dirty linen at home, if we can. Just now it would be ruin to me to have paragraphs in the paper about my private affairs.'

'But if—if anything has happened——'

'There will then, perhaps, be some other way out of it,' he interrupted drily.

What he meant was, as she well understood, that if her father was dead and had died intestate, he would be his heir, and therefore independent of consequences. Trenna herself had no love for her parent; it was impossible she should have it, but she could not forget the tie of blood; she shuddered at her brother's cold repudiation of it.

‘The place is fast enough,’ he said, trying the door with his shoulder.

‘Great Heavens! do not ring the bell,’ she cried; for he was groping with his hand among the branches of the withered creeper. The notion of the bell echoing through the deserted house, with none to answer it except, perhaps, the dead, appalled her.

‘Pshaw! I am looking for the key,’ he answered contemptuously. Then she remembered that, when Kit or her father were out at

night, it sometimes used to be left in that place of concealment, in order that they might let themselves in. How long ago, and far away, such incidents, and the life that contained them, seemed to be!

‘No, the key is gone; I cannot see into the hall for something across the keyhole.’

‘What, what?’ ejaculated Trenna, whose nerves were thoroughly disorganised.

‘Well, I suppose a cobweb. There is nothing to be done here.’

‘Then we must go back, I suppose,’ said Trenna, in a tone which was meant to be one of disappointment, but which savoured unmistakably of relief.

‘There are other ways of entering a house than by the door,’ he answered; ‘and I think I know one in this case.’

He walked round to the pantry window,

which, to all appearance, was strongly barred by iron uprights shaped like javelins. Three of these he shook lightly ; each of them in time yielded, and passing them through the holes in the bar that formed their cross support he laid them on the margin of the flower-bed that skirted the wall. There was now room enough to pass through the bars, and it only remained to open the window, which, as it happened, was unbolted.

Trenna expressed no surprise at this operation, and, indeed, her thoughts were too much occupied to feel it ; but on Kit's lips was a grim smile. How often had he let himself out by that very way at night and let himself in again, and no one within doors been any the wiser. He was a man of business now, and the remembrance of the follies of his youth only evoked his contempt. It was seldom,

indeed, he reflected, such peccadilloes bring anything but repentance, yet they were not without their use in the present emergency.

Having effected an entrance for himself through the pantry, he passed through the kitchen, empty and cold, and, unbolting the back door, admitted his sister.

It is strange how suddenly all the inanimate things that minister to man decay when the man is gone ; even his memory with his fellow-creatures survives them. Though everything on which Trenna set eyes was of course familiar to her, they had already suffered change. There was green on the walls and grey on the floors, for where there was no damp there was dust. Nothing had been removed, save in her own sitting-room, where the family portraits of the Gisartos had been taken down, probably for transport to their

native land. Having cast off his descendants, Mr. Garston, senior, had transferred his affections to his ancestors, who were not in a position to give him trouble. In their places were black spaces, themselves looking like pictures in the Rembrandt style, with the wall paper for their frames. On the ceiling was the hook from which her bird's cage used to hang—the only object which had the slightest association of pleasure or attachment for her. If Poll had been dead instead of at the Knoll (with nuts at discretion—though he had not much of that—and in the highest feather) the spectacle would have brought tears into her eyes. If she had not taken him away with her, it was her belief that he would have been left to starve to death.

In the hall hung a coat or two, retaining some ghastly similitude to the human form, but

with naught but the moth in them ; and on the floor lay a great heap of letters which had been thrust through the box and left by the postman. Kit noticed that his father's hat and umbrella were gone.

In the study, as the clients' room was called, the spiders, with a fine sense of the fitness of things, had spun their webs everywhere—on the tin boxes with the dummy deeds in them ; on the very chair-back on which the lawyer used to lean, and across his desk and drawers. But instead of the usual litter of papers everything had been carefully put away. The clock upon the mantelpiece pointed in silence to midnight or noonday.

All these things were plain enough, for Kit had flung back the shutters and let the wintry light in ; but there was no brightness anywhere. The dust did not rise, for there was no

air ; but hand and foot left their marks in it wherever they fell. The absence of any such traces save their own showed that the place had remained inviolate

‘It is plain that he has gone,’ said Trenna, unconscious of the hushed and awe-struck tones in which she spoke ; ‘is it worth while to go upstairs?’

‘I shall go,’ returned Kit, firmly ; ‘perhaps you had better wait down here.’

The same idea, though moving them very differently, was in both their minds. The tenant of the Grey House—or what was left of him—might possibly be in his own room.

‘Wait here? I dare not,’ murmured Trenna. ‘No ; I will go with you.’ Her brother’s resolution terrified her almost as much as its possible result. How marvellous it seemed that this bright and genial creature

should have such stern stuff in him. Was it the courage of desperation, and if so, whither, under circumstances not more terrible, but more perilous, might it not lead him? Hitherto, with all her admiration of him, she had thought him mainly swayed by impulse.

After the first flight of stairs—so severely economical had been the state of things at the Grey House—there was no carpet, and their footsteps on the naked wood awoke the dreary echoes. Kit stopped at his father's door and tried it. It was locked. 'Stand back, dear,' he said gently, and with a blow from his fist against the panel he drove it in. There was a noise of something falling inside the room, which made the girl's blood run cold. 'It is only some damp plaster from the ceiling,' said Kit, encouragingly; he was looking through

the hole the crash had made. 'There is nothing here.'

Another, and another blow, which reverberated through the house like pistol shots, and then the door gave way. The room was empty like the rest, though the drawn-down blind and the blank silence seemed to suggest the presence of Death. The bed was made; it was probable that its former tenant had not used it during that last night of his sojourn. There were two candles on the table burnt very low, but they had not guttered down; they had been blown out. In the grate and under it was a profusion of paper ashes. 'Preparations for departure,' said Kit, pointing them out with his finger. 'He has burnt his boats, and will not return.'

Trenna made a sign of acquiescence; she could not speak. Her mind was too highly

wrought. If that had been there which she had half expected to see, she said to herself, 'It would have killed me.' She used to think, notwithstanding his acknowledged superiority over her in other respects, that she had more command over her feelings than her brother had. She did not think so now. The very atmosphere of the room seemed almost to stifle her, and she said so.

'It is very musty,' he answered quietly; 'I will light a cigar.' He lit one, and then went on with his investigations. 'There is nothing more to be seen or to be found out,' he observed presently. 'The bird is flown and the nest deserted; let us go.'

Trenna went downstairs with him nothing loth.

'I cannot understand,' she said, 'why he made such a mystery of his departure.' It

was noticeable that they now spoke of their father, whenever it was possible, in the third person. 'Mr. Raikes (the owner of the Grey House) has, I hear, never had a word from him as to giving up the lease.'

'I understand it very well,' said Kit: 'he wished to make us as uncomfortable as possible to the very last. I am very glad we came, and have seen how matters stand with our own eyes. As it happens, he has done me a good turn by taking himself off.'

They had reached the kitchen, and having taken the key from the back door Kit let himself and his sister out, and locked it behind them. 'Now I am Christopher Garston, Esq., of the Grey House, Mogadion,' he said.

'Good Heavens! what do you mean, Kit? You are surely not going to live in that hateful house?'

‘Not I. But since he has left it for good and all, there is no harm in my using it for my private address. It will look very well in the prospectus. We can do without the General now. What the Company wanted was a good local name to put on the Board of Directors. And now they have got it; and I shall add 300*l.* a year to my income.’

CHAPTER XL.

BAD NEWS.

KIT drove back to the Knoll, after his visit to the empty house, in the highest spirits. Nothing, as he assured Trenna, could have turned out better than the result of their expedition. 'I am a made man now so far as the Company is concerned, and, what pleases me more than all, it is to the Governor I am indebted for it. To think that he put 300*l.* a year in his son's pocket without its costing him a sixpence should rejoice his parental heart.'

Trenna answered only with a sigh and a

shiver. The sense of impending calamity was heavy upon her. Now that her father was gone she had a dread of him, and of the consequences of his enmity, which she had never felt while under the same roof with him.

‘My darling Trenna, that visit to the Grey House has shaken your nerves,’ said Kit, tenderly; ‘you want change of air and change of scene. As soon as I get back to London I shall look out for a suitable home for you, and then you shall come and live with me. That was always your dream, you know.’

It was true that it had been so, but now that he spoke of its being realised it had no longer the charms for her that it had possessed in imagination. Not that she loved him less, or had any idea of having a home apart from him, but that that which he proposed to offer her would, she felt, be different from the one

she had pictured to herself. Her views had not been ambitious: for herself, indeed, she would have required very little, and though Kit, she knew, would not have been satisfied with that, she had hoped he would have been content with some day of small things, till his talents had gained their reward in due season. She wanted 'peace and quietness.' Having sowed his wild oats—which included the commission of one perilous crime—she had imagined that her darling Kit would have 'settled down' to some legitimate calling, at which he would work diligently every day, while in social life he would remain as ever the favourite of all who knew him; that she would keep his house and minister to his needs, and find the greatest pleasure in the contemplation of his prosperity. His present position, as he himself described it, with an income already

sufficient and soon to be augmented by 300*l.* a year, was far above her expectations in one way, but far below them in another. The society of his fine friends would, she perceived, be not to her taste; for—how different from those at the Knoll!—they were fine-weather friends. If the mine failed they would desert him, and doubtless blame him for its failure. She did not want to see Kit in splendour, but in security.

‘Where you are I shall be pleased to be, Kit,’ she answered quietly, ‘and, indeed, I feel I have trespassed on the hospitality of our dear friends here long enough, and that I ought to be making my own living, or helping you—if I *can* help you—to make yours.’

‘You can help me very much, Trenna,’ Kit answered gravely. ‘There is nothing that gives more confidence to a man of business in

a large way than to know that the belongings of those who are assisting him in his schemes are of a high class; it is almost as good as their having money of their own to lose—"a stake in the country."

'But perhaps your friend, Mr. Braithwaite, may not estimate me as you do, dear Kit.'

'Pooh, pooh, the man is not a fool, though his mind has run to scrip and share; you will represent to him 5,000*l.* worth of stock at the very least.'

'I hope you will see the interest of it,' she answered, smiling.

'The worst of it is,' said Kit, thoughtfully, 'the old man has neither wife nor daughter; and at first I am afraid there will be very little female society for you. When once the opportunity offers I have no fears, but in the meantime you will have to make your own

way. I am afraid you will find London dull till you come to know people.'

'I don't want any one but you, Kit. Of course I shall feel parting with dear Maud, but that will not be for ever, let us hope.'

'Not for long,' answered Kit, gravely. 'That is a matter on which I want to have a few words with you. Before I leave the Knoll I mean to ask Maud to be my wife.'

'Kit, that would be sheer madness!'

For the moment she had forgotten that he knew nothing of the attachment that had sprung up between Maud and Frank Meade, which she was quite convinced Kit had no power to shake, whatever might have been the case some months ago. The confidence of her tone perhaps raised some suspicion in her brother's mind, for he flushed to his forehead.

'Madness!' he echoed, 'I do not under-

stand you, Trenna. Maud has heard me ask that very question—though I admit not in so many words—and certainly did not doubt my sanity. Moreover, when I last hinted at this very thing, I was in a far less prosperous condition; indeed, it was my means alone, or rather the want of them, that prevented my speaking out. She knew, however, what I meant, and did not reprove, far less reject me. Yet now I am my own master, and half way on the road to fortune, you talk of “madness” as though I had no chance with her.’

‘In my opinion, my dear brother, you *have* no chance.’

‘Why not? Maud is still herself, and if I am changed it is for the better. Why not?’

Trenna was silent. She dared not say that Maud was not what he had left her, since that would have involved the mention of Frank

Meade. She could not bear, even from Kit, to hear him spoken of with antagonism, or, still worse, contempt.

‘You may’ have great expectations, Kit,’ she said at last, ‘but you have nothing sure. To me you are all in all ; I am ready to take all risks with you ; to endure adversity, to skate with you over very thin ice indeed. But look into your own heart and answer truly, is Maud fit for that ?’

‘That is for her to judge,’ he answered ; ‘I shall tell her all.’

‘No, Kit, not all.’

He turned upon her with fury in his eyes ; but it was only for an instant. The remembrance of her devotion stayed the torrent on his lips.

‘Not all, of course, Trenna,’ he answered in low tones. ‘Why should I speak to her of what

is over and gone? Do you suppose that any man speaks to the girl he loves of all his past? I have sinned, and I have suffered. Let that suffice. Is a man to go on all-fours all his life because he has tripped once or twice?’

‘Once or twice! I wish he had said “once,”’ thought Trenna to herself. ‘Is it possible that he has got into trouble *again*?’

‘As to my future,’ he continued, ‘I shall lay it all before her. I have nothing to conceal. Even now I can maintain her in the same luxury and comfort to which she has been accustomed; and in a few years I shall have a large fortune amply sufficient for her, and you, and me. You will forgive me,’ he added, with a tender smile, ‘for putting Maud first, Trenna?’

‘I will forgive you if she becomes your wife, Kit. I will endeavour, though it will be

very hard, to give up the first place in your affections to the woman you may choose for your bride.'

'I *have* chosen ; none but Maud will content me. When I have set my heart upon a thing I am not easily moved from it, as you know. I had hoped to have your assistance, Trenna, in this matter ; but there, it seems, I was mistaken.'

'You have my good wishes, Kit.'

'Tut, tut !' he put in impatiently, 'say that I have your prayers at once. I prefer deeds to words.'

'You are not angry with me, Kit?'

'No, no. I never can be that. Of your good word I may be surely certain?' His tone nevertheless was one of inquiry. His intuition was so keen that he read his sister's very heart in this matter, and felt that, while

content to trust in him herself, she trembled for her friend.

‘You may be very certain, Kit, that I shall never breathe one word in your disparagement.’

‘That’s well,’ he answered cheerfully, and kissed her. ‘You are my providence, Trena, and like the hunter I will be satisfied, since if you are not for *me* you will not at least be for the bear—see, there is the old Doctor driving away from the Knoll’ (for they had come in sight of the gates), ‘there can be surely nothing the matter since we left it.’

There was nothing the matter at the Knoll, but Doctor Meade had brought sad news which had touched the little household nearly. His son Frank had been taken ill in London, and that so seriously that it was a question whether his father should not go up to him. What

added, if it were possible, to the interest excited by this intelligence, was that his illness had been contracted in the exercise of his profession. In endeavouring to relieve a little child suffering from some disorder of the throat, for which an operation had been necessary, the young man had placed his lips to the wound, and was now himself prostrated by the same complaint. With true womanly kindness Mrs. Medway had at once offered to go and nurse him.

‘I can get ready in half an hour,’ she had said to his father, ‘and will accompany you to London this very day, if you think my services would be of any assistance.’

The good Doctor had been deeply moved by this proposal.

‘Frank must be ill, indeed,’ he said, ‘if the news of such an offer does not do him good. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, both

on his behalf and my own. But where he is, in his own hospital, there will be no lack of excellent nurses. If he recovers'—here the Doctor's voice grew very husky—'I shall send for him home, for he will need recruiting, and then you shall be as kind to him as you please.'

'Is the disease so very serious, then, even to a grown person?' (for the child had died).

The Doctor nodded, and shut his lips together.

The tears rolled silently down Mrs. Medway's cheeks.

'Poor Frank, dear Frank,' said Mark, softly; 'may God spare him to you, Doctor, even from a hero's death! Is it not just what we should all have expected of him, Maud?'

There was no reply, though her white lips moved a little.

‘Give her air,’ cried the Doctor, decisively, his personal affliction forgotten in a moment in his professional instincts. ‘Mark, fetch a glass of wine.’

The breeze through the opened window, assisted by her own efforts to recover herself, revived the girl at once; but it was plain she had been on the very brink of a fainting fit.

‘I had no idea your Maud was so impressionable,’ was all that the Doctor remarked upon the matter to Mrs. Medway, and, indeed, all he thought about it; but to the mother’s eye the circumstance had more significance. Young ladies have the faculty of producing tears of sympathy in any quantity and on the shortest notice; but white lips and (especially) the inability to use them is a more serious symptom.

‘Maud was so upset,’ as Mark explained to

Kit and Trenna on their arrival, by this news about 'dear old Frank,' that she had retired to her own room. It was thought only natural that Trenna should repair thither to comfort her; but in truth Trenna herself was glad of the excuse to escape from the public eye. That old folly of hers (as she denounced it to herself) in relation to Frank Meade had not been so utterly stamped out, but that this news of his misfortune agitated her exceedingly.

'The man, then, whom I revere most of all men,' she thought to herself bitterly, 'is about to die in the conviction that I am a thief.'

Her creed as to the future prevented her even from believing that he would have clearer insight in another world. Her distress of mind was such that she did not dare present herself at once to Maud, but diverged, on her way up to her room, into the boudoir in order to sit

there a few moments to collect herself. The place was unhappily chosen, inasmuch as it was the scene of the interview with poor Lucy concerning the lost bank-note, in which she herself had played so false a part, and the recollection of it pierced her heart.

‘What a vile and worthless wretch I am,’ murmured the unhappy Trenna, as she stood before the pier-glass rubbing her cheeks and lips with her handkerchief to bring back their colour, which had fled from them. ‘Even unsuspecting Maud would read guilt in this tell-tale face. Perhaps he is thinking of her now as he lies upon his death-bed, and in the contemplation of her innocence and simplicity finds his chief comfort. If he thinks of *me* it is at best with contemptuous pity. Yet what have I done save for my brother’s sake?’

She clasped her hands passionately together,

and looked upwards half mechanically, or in imitation of a familiar action perhaps that had fallen into disuse. 'No,' she said, stamping her foot upon the ground, 'Kit is right; there is no Heaven for there is no justice.'

Then smoothing her hair with her hands, and with a glance that seemed to satisfy her at the cold set face in the mirror, she turned from it abruptly and went into her friend's room.

CHAPTER XLI.

A CHECK.

IN the little drawing-room below stairs Kit was listening to the details of Frank's misfortune from Mark and Mrs. Medway with secret impatience. It would have been false to say that the news did not interest him, and an exaggeration to say that it pleased him. He was too good-natured a man to wish any one harm who had not deliberately wronged him ; but, if he had not been a sceptic about such matters, he would have felt glad (as many Christians do feel under such similar circumstances) to know that certain person was in Heaven. He had no

idea that Frank was his rival in Maud's affections; he thought too lightly of him and too much of himself to admit such a suspicion, but he did think that his friends at the Knoll made too much of Frank, and that the fact of their doing so was in some sort a depreciation of *him*. For Meade had some strong points in which he himself was deficient. He was plodding, diligent, moral, a dutiful son, and, as Kit summed him up in a couple of contemptuous words, 'eminently respectable'; that he had talents, too, was certain, but in Kit's view they were of a humdrum sort. If, as he expressed it, Meade ever did set fire to the Thames, it would be by a very slow process of combustion indeed.

He was thus appraising Frank in his own mind—a circumstance which gave him every appearance of serious concern—while the

Doctor's account of his seizure and illness was being poured into his ears.

‘I knew you would feel this bad news, Kit, as much as any of us,’ said Mrs. Medway. The remark perhaps was a little too ingenuous, and suggested, in contradiction to its verbal protest, that the speaker had, with woman's keenness, detected that the two young men had not been always *en rapport* with one another.

‘*Of course* he feels it, mother,’ exclaimed Mark, with half-conscious irritation; ‘who could help feeling it, and least of all dear Kit? It is not only that Frank is an old friend, but the circumstances of the case are so profoundly touching. He has run the risk of sacrificing his life for an unknown fellow-creature, a friendless child. It is noble. It is magnificent.’

Kit nodded. ‘One has hardly heard of

such a thing,' he said, 'since the days of Queen Eleanor.'

'My dear Kit, how strangely you put things,' said Mrs. Medway, reprovingly. It seemed to her that the historical parallel held a joke in it.

'But it is so,' urged Kit with a grave face. 'It is true that in the Queen's case there was no danger, though it is charitable to suppose she did not know it. Now Meade, being a doctor himself, must have fully estimated his own peril.'

'Quite true,' assented Mark with approbation. 'If Frank survives, which I pray Heaven he may, he will be a noble type of the most noble of professions.'

'No doubt it is a little given to extremes, however,' observed Kit. 'At one end, to which Meade belongs of course, we have the Queen

Eleanors in bree—that is in broadcloth, and at the other end the Vivisectionists, of whom I will only say that universal benevolence is not their leading feature.'

'Cruel wretches—brutes !' exclaimed Mrs. Medway with a shudder.

'You compliment them, mother,' observed Mark, who shrunk from the infliction of pain on his fellow-creatures quite as much as any woman could do.

'I cordially agree with you,' said Kit. 'But I remember—it shows what *esprit de corps* can do—that Frank himself used to make some sort of defence or excuse——'

'No, no,' said Mark, eagerly ; 'he was always most urgent on the employment of anæsthetics in all cases.'

'By medical students ?' inquired Kit,

with a cynical smile, and a look towards Mrs. Medway.

‘Oh, pray don’t let us argue the matter—at least not now,’ pleaded that lady earnestly. ‘It is quite true that dear Frank and I did not quite agree about it; he had naturally greater confidence in the humanity of all members of his profession, however young, than I had.’

‘Naturally,’ assented Kit, and no more was said on the subject. If he had not absolutely chilled the enthusiasm on Frank’s account, he had checked it; and at all events released himself from further sufferings as a listener to the eulogies pronounced upon him. Kit had a complacent conviction that he had succeeded in a neat stroke of diplomacy (indeed, had Fate permitted of it, he would have been a valuable

addition to the Foreign Office), and his success gave him courage for another essay in the same way, not, however, so unpremeditated. Notwithstanding the news of the morning, he determined to open his heart to Maud that very day.

This is one of the errors, notwithstanding all that has been written on ‘opportunity,’ in which the cleverest people are apt to fall. They have such confidence in their own powers that they launch their bark notwithstanding that the stream is manifestly against them, rather than wait an hour for the flow of the tide. Indeed, there are some natures, and those of a high order, which cannot brook delay where there are obstacles to be overcome, and which prefer to attack them at once, though at an obvious disadvantage.

Until Trenna had spoken to him on the

subject a few hours before, Kit had not dreamt of opposition from Maud, at least of an active kind; at the very worst he expected to be referred to 'mamma,' and with Mark's help he flattered himself that that would be equivalent to an acceptance.

His suspicions, however, had now been aroused; not alone by Trenna's words, but by the manner in which Maud had taken Frank's misfortune to heart, and he burnt to resolve them.

Under pretence of seeking his sister he found his way to the boudoir, where Trenna joined him.

'Can I see Maud for a few minutes?' he said, with a peremptoriness which she knew too well to oppose. 'Be so good as to ask her.'

Trenna sighed, and withdrew without a

word. Then returned with 'Maud is far from well. She is not equal to any excitement——'

'Why should she be excited?' he interrupted impatiently. 'What have you been telling her about me?'

'Not one word, Kit. If she has any suspicion in her mind of what you wish to say to her, it is not I who put it there. She says, "Tell Kit, if he does not mind, perhaps to-morrow——"'

'Perhaps to-morrow I shall not be here,' he answered curtly.

'Oh, Kit, what do you mean? You are not going away from us so soon?'

'That depends on Maud.'

Trenna flushed up, and the tears came into her eyes.

'My darling, forgive me,' he whispered

fondly. 'You are first with me, and always will be ; but I have set my heart on winning this girl.'

Trenna shook her head. 'You will never win her.'

'That remains to be seen,' he answered. 'At all events I will know the worst.'

Trenna's heart was torn this way and that ; she yearned to tell him, 'to-day is your worst chance.' On the other hand, for Maud's sake, it was well that her answer should be given when there could be no doubt of its nature. As to herself, Kit's words had hurt her but for a moment. That 'You are first with me, and always will be,' had been balm, and healed the wound. She did not even say to herself, 'I shall be first with him whether he will or no, for Maud will never wed him.' She knew she would be first in any case.

‘ You will not be hard on her, Kit, whatever happens,’ she pleaded.

‘ Remember what she has led me to think,’ was his quiet reply ; ‘ in no case, however, will I be hard upon her.’ And in this he spoke truly. To those he loved he was in manner always tender ; if he said an angry word to them he repented of his wrath as soon as it was uttered. ‘ A very affectionate scoundrel ’ was the epithet applied to him long afterwards by one of our *dramatis personæ*, who was no friend of his, but who could see the bright side of him.

Summoned by Trenna, Maud came in alone ; her face was pale, and her beautiful eyes looked softer even than they were wont to be, from the traces of many tears ; she held out her hand to Kit quite frankly.

‘ We are all in great trouble to-day,’ she said.

‘Yes, indeed. I would not have been so importunate to see you but that it is my last chance. It is possible that I may be going back to London to-morrow.’

‘To London!’

There was nowhere else he could be expected to go, yet her interest was plainly awakened by the place, and not by the fact of his departure.

‘You will see poor Frank, then. Oh, is it not sad, Kit!’

‘It is very sad. He is young and strong, however, and there is every hope that he will get over it.’

‘His father did not say so.’

‘Well, no; a father always fears the worst—at least most fathers. Frank has been more fortunate than I,’ he added, with a smile, ‘in his choice of a parent. Maud, dear,’ here he

drew his chair close beside her, 'listen to me. I am a man who has not had a fair chance of starting in the race of Life ; but I am coming to the front at last. Of course it pleases me to find it so, but not for my own sake.'

'I am sure of that, Kit,' was her quiet reply. 'Trenna has often told me that you are as devoted to her as she is to you.'

'And so I trust I am,' he answered modestly. 'Nevertheless, the chief object of my life, and the spur of all my exertions, is not Trenna. To her, and therefore to me, so far as she is concerned, it would not much matter whether I became a rich man or not. You may say, perhaps, that that also does not much matter to the girl I have in my mind, and who has not a sordid idea in her composition. But as a poor man I could never have asked her to be my wife. Maud,

dear Maud, you know that I forbore to do so, and the cause.'

Maud's face was crimson, and her voice faltered as she replied, 'If you speak of me, Kit——'

He smiled, and patted her hand caressingly. 'There is no "if" in the case,' he put in softly.

'Indeed, Kit, but there is. You have fallen into a grievous error. What you hint at is impossible.'

'You mean that what I did hint at was impossible,' he returned gravely; 'but it is not so now. In a few months I can provide you with a home, which, though not so beautiful as this, will be only in that one respect less worthy of you. I can now support you as my wife in the same comfort which you have always enjoyed; yet it will be only my first step on the road to fortune.'

‘No, Kit, no, it is not that,’ she answered. ‘Money, if it were millions, would make no difference.’

‘Then where is the obstacle?’ he asked, with no amazement, and even with a smile of confidence.

‘I do not love you, Kit—that is,’ she stammered, for his face had grown black as night, ‘not well enough to be your wife. You will always be to me as a brother, but——’

‘Was it as a brother I spoke to you that day upon the river?’ he broke in in earnest tones; ‘was it as a sister that you answered me? As we came up together to this house after the accident was it as a brother and sister?’

‘You had just saved my life.’

He waved his hand impatiently. ‘Pray

put that aside; I should have saved any woman's life as readily.'

'Still, you saved mine, and I shall never forget it.'

'Good. Then you must have a memory for other things. Do you recollect the words I spoke to you on that occasion?' She bowed her head.

'Then is it possible you could have mistaken their meaning? It is true I did not say "Will you marry me?" but I did say—that is, you understood my words to imply—"I love you, and only wait till I am in a position to declare my love." Come Maud, the truth, the truth?'

'No, I did not understand that?'

'What did you understand?'

'I thought you entertained some affection for me—nay, an affection much beyond my

poor deserts, but that you also doubted of its being returned ; and that having placed me under the deepest obligation you hesitated from motives of generosity to press your suit.'

'But if I had done so you would have granted it?'

'I cannot say : I am not sure. But I am quite sure now. I cannot be your wife.'

'What have I done then in the meantime to make you less favourably disposed towards me than you were then?'

'Nothing, nothing.'

'Then what has altered you?'

'Nothing.'

He smiled incredulously. 'These,' he said, 'are contradictions indeed. I was a struggling man without even expectations ; now I am on the high road to Fortune ; what change there is in me is therefore for the better. And you,

Maud, were then what you are now. The alteration, then, must be within yourself.'

'I do not know—except that I cannot be your wife.'

'Pardon me, but you do know. You love another man?'

The statement, though it was made decisively enough, was put in the form of a question, and to reply to it was most difficult as well as embarrassing to the unhappy Maud. 'It is easy,' one often hears it said, 'to tell the truth;' and still oftener, 'It is always right to tell the truth.' There are cases, however, to which even the last dogma does not apply. When a would-be assassin inquires the whereabouts of his intended victim, for example, and when silence would betray his place of concealment, it has been decided by the moralists that a lie is not only excusable but meritorious.

To a selfish man it would be easy enough in such a case to tell the truth ; for in so doing, as he flatters himself, he loses all responsibility, and leaves the blood of the slain on the soul of the murderer ; but it would not be right.

If Frank Meade had offered his hand to Maud, she would have had no hesitation, notwithstanding the terror with which Kit inspired her, in replying to his question. But Frank had not done so. She was not sure—at least not quite sure—so she reasoned in that awful moment—that he intended to do so. And was it to be expected under such circumstances that a modest and delicate-minded girl should confess to an attachment which might not be returned ? Nevertheless, there was something in a direct denial which seemed to her treasonable to Frank himself.

‘ You have no right, Kit,’ she answered

quietly but firmly, 'to put to me any such a question.'

'No right? What! when I have loved you for years, and when you have known it at least for months? No right, when I have again and again all but asked you to be my wife without reproof? No right, when on the answer you are about to give me will depend not only my hopes of happiness, but my faith in woman? Look into your own heart, Maud, and ask it if I have no right.'

In her heart of hearts she answered to herself he had a right. It was true she had never encouraged his addresses, but it was also true, as he had said, that she had never reproved them. Her fear of him, though vague, had been too intense. It was only when he had been very pertinacious, as in that morning on the river, that she had ventured to parry his

advances; nay, an hour later, after the accident, she had not even attempted to parry them. It was not unnatural, therefore, that he should have taken her silence for consent.

‘I think you have a right,’ she answered slowly; ‘but it would be cruel to me and disappointing to yourself to exercise it.’

‘Nevertheless I must needs do so,’ was his quiet reply. ‘I again ask of you have you engaged yourself to another man?’

‘And I answer, on my word, sir, that I have not.’

‘That is well,’ he answered in a tone of intense relief. ‘I felt that it must be so. You are too honest, too honourable——’

‘Whatever I am,’ she interrupted in her turn, ‘it can make no difference as to that other matter. Do not let us quarrel, Kit; we

are too old friends for that ; but it is useless to deceive yourself.'

'I understand,' he put in gently. 'You had it in your mind to say you loved another in order to relieve yourself of an embarrassment, but that inveterate habit of telling the truth was too much for you. Dear Maud, believe me, I am not angry because you hesitate to accept my offer. After all, what have you got to trust to with respect to these expectations of mine but my bare word. And *my* word is not like *your* word,' he added naïvely.

'As I told you before, Kit, had you millions it would not alter my determination on this matter.'

'So you say. If you were a less truthful woman I should believe you because I should still think, despite your protestations, that you

loved another man; but as you have told me that is not so, my case cannot be hopeless, for I am conscious of having done nothing to lower me in your eyes, since you used so patiently to listen to my pleading. I will not now importune you further; I could not bring myself to inflict the least pain upon you whatever advantage I might derive from it, but a time will come—it must, it shall come—when you will admit in words what you have often tacitly acknowledged.’

‘Never, never,’ she interrupted earnestly.

‘Never is a long day,’ he answered smiling.

‘What I have set my heart on, Maud, I have rarely failed in attaining, and I have set my heart—for years—on you.’

He rose, kissed her on the forehead, and left the room without a word. Maud was dreadfully agitated; all her old fears of him—

not, indeed, the old fear that he would be too strong for her, and compel her to marry him in spite of herself—that she felt was beyond his powers—but her apprehensions of the force and vehemence of his character, of the passion that had led him into scrapes, and might lead him to acts of desperation, recurred to her mind. What he had said about his resolution to attain his object was, she knew, quite true, and he had seemed to set his soul on it in that burning kiss. If anything were to happen to Frank, how terrible, she thought, would this man become to her with his unavailing but confident importunities. Her terror of him must have been great indeed since it conjured up such a picture; for the idea of Frank Meade dead was a possibility so freighted with wretchedness that she had put it away from her mind with horror. How heartless she had

been to speak of love to another man while Frank lay ill, and perhaps dying! How wicked of her to have disguised the truth; how disloyal not to have acknowledged, at whatever cost to herself, that Frank was all in all to her!

CHAPTER XLII.

AN ALLY.

ON his way downstairs Kit found Trena awaiting him, and they went into the little drawing-room together.

‘I knew how it would be, darling,’ she whispered tenderly; ‘but don’t be cast down: don’t take it to heart.’

‘I am not cast down,’ he said, returning her embrace. ‘Why should I be?’

‘What? Has she not rejected you?’

‘She has not accepted me. I am disappointed, of course; but it is only a question of

time. Do you think I am one to be cast down by the caprice of a woman ? ’

‘ But oh, Kit, are you not deceiving yourself ? Are you sure it was caprice ? ’

‘ What else could it be ? She loved me once, as I have told you. I have her own assurance that she loves no one else. She will be my wife, Trenna, as sure as you are my sister. You thought me too confident, however, and you are right. I ought first to have secured Mark’s good word ; had I done so, the matter would have been settled by this time. As it is I am on probation. ’

Trenna stared at him in amazement, not knowing what to think. She was aware of his sanguine disposition, and how the Wish was father to the Expectation with him ; but, on the other hand (though it had never been confided to her), she was in possession of Maud’s

secret. How, therefore, unless Maud had deceived him—which was the very last thing to be believed—could Kit speak of himself as on probation?

What would have distressed her, indeed, but for the promise that she should join him almost immediately, was his announcement that he should return to town the next morning. ‘I cannot stay down here,’ he explained; ‘I grudge every moment that is not spent in establishing myself in my proper position.’

From which she guessed that his hope lay, as respected Maud, in his social advancement. The statement was not flattering to her *amour propre*; it was hard, after all her sacrifices, that another should be the mainspring of her brother’s actions; but her love for him was as absolute and unselfish as that of a mother for

her boy. It was also easier, perhaps, to forgive him, since she knew he was basing his expectations on false grounds; for what did Maud care for social success? Instead of anger Trenna felt pity for him; when the time came in which he should acknowledge his illusion, it would be her welcome task to comfort and console him. She looked forward with the greatest satisfaction to taking her place as the mistress of his house; but even that was not a source of selfish pleasure; she was anxious and apprehensive about that future which he painted in such brilliant colours; and she wished to be by his side to defend him from every enemy—nay, even from himself.

Mark, on the other hand, was distressed and outraged at the news of his friend's departure.

‘What? Are you leaving us again, Kit, after two days? It is not friendly—it is not kind.’

‘It is kindness to myself, Mark; or rather it would be cruel to ask me to remain, as I am at present situated.’

And then he told him for the first time of his love for Maud, and how his wooing had sped. Mark’s astonishment was unbounded. He had never suspected his friend’s attachment to his sister. Marriage and giving in marriage were matters which (with one notable exception) had never entered his thoughts. His ways were as methodical and old-fashioned as those of Mr. Penryn himself. He had seen no reason why the little household at the Knoll and their Mogadion friends should not jog on together as they had always done. *He* had never wanted to marry Kit’s sister. However,

since this unlooked-for disturbance of social relations had taken place, he declared himself at once upon Kit's side. It was impossible, he averred, that Maud could find a better husband; and of course it would give him personally nothing but pleasure to find himself bound to Kit—though closer to him he could never be—by this new tie. He pictured the young couple living under the same roof with him, so that he would never lose the companionship of his old friend. 'I only regret,' he said, settling his spectacles on his nose, with a sly smile, 'the marriage present which I should most like to give you will hardly be ready in time unless you postpone the happy day for a year or two.'

He was thinking, of course, of his County History.

Kit reminded him that he had already

hinted there was a little hitch; that Maud, in short, had not yet accepted him.

‘Oh, but I’ll speak to Maud,’ said Mark, ‘I’ll make that all right, bless you. Only you must not leave us in such a hurry.’

He seemed to think that if Maud really understood that her conduct was shortening Kit’s visit it was impossible she could persist in it.

Kit smiled, as well he might, at his friend’s affectionate simplicity.

‘No, don’t do that, old fellow; at least, not just yet. If you mention the matter to any one, say a word or two for me to your mother.’

‘I am sure my mother would be delighted to have you for a son-in-law.’

‘I hope so; but tell her what I have told you about my prospects. It is only natural—and, indeed, right—that she should have

some grounds for confidence in my ability to support dear Maud in the position she has always occupied.'

'Just so; the less change that takes place amongst us the better,' said Mark, then added, almost fretfully, 'But your presence here is such a pleasure to us, Kit, why should you go?'

On Mark's side, at least, the parting between the two young men was more like the separation of lovers. It was vain to assure him that they would soon meet again; it gave him as little comfort as the schoolboy torn from home derives from the well-worn remark that 'the vacation will soon come round again.'

It was hard for mere outsiders to understand Mark Medway's excessive attachment to Kit Garston, and still harder for Kit's detractors. Mr. Penryn used to quote Falstaff's explanation of the mystery: 'The fellow must certainly

have given him potions.' But the fact was, all that was wanting, and wanted, in Mark's nature Kit supplied ; his society had a charm for him which he sought in vain in the companionship of others ; it encouraged Ambition and extinguished Despondency. He owed him two great debts, for he had saved his Life and preserved his Honour. He admired his talents above measure. Moreover, he was well convinced—and in this, too, he made no error, save, perhaps, in degree—that his affection for his friend was reciprocated. Under these circumstances, it was no wonder that even Mark's mother had sometimes said to her son betwixt a sigh and a smile, ' I am really almost jealous of Kit.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

MRS. MEDWAY SEES HER MISTAKE.

To all at the Knoll, save one, Kit's departure was a serious disappointment, for it had been understood that he would have stayed at Mogadion for some weeks 'on business.' Trenna alone was aware that the chief object of his coming had been accomplished in his having secured a local name for the list of subscribers and a good address for the Cook's Creek scheme. Even Mrs. Medway, who had arrived at that time of life when one's world begins to narrow itself to one's own home and belongings, felt his loss keenly, though it is true as much on her son's account

as on her own. Mark had grown grave and silent of late months, though not actually despondent as he had been before, and he was 'another creature,' as his mother phrased it, when Kit was with him.

Kit was quite right (notwithstanding the proverb that says, 'If you want a thing done well, do it yourself') to leave to Mark the task of pleading for him with his mother. Everything from Mark's lips had force with her; even what was unwelcome to her ears became grateful; but on the whole his present tidings were not unwelcome. Her chief objection to Christopher Garston as a son-in-law (for she had considered the matter hypothetically more than once, as mothers will do) had always been that he had no means. No one laid stress on wealth as necessary to happiness less than did Mrs. Medway; she had herself once possessed it, and

given it up, for conscience' sake, with no keen regret ; but comfort and competence she did value. Her Maud of course had had no experience of narrow means ; of the struggle to keep up appearances ; of the thought that must needs be given to shillings and sixpences ; of the cutting and contriving to make both ends meet ; and she would have been very unwilling to expose her to them. On the other hand, she knew the stuff of which her daughter was made, and would have given her to any worthy man who had won her heart, on easy terms as respected income. She had a high opinion of Kit's talents, and especially of his knowledge of mankind ; she thought, notwithstanding that she had heard rumours of his being a little wild, that he had a good heart ; and indeed she had a notion (often entertained by women) that his very wildness was a proof of an affectionate

disposition. He had now, it seemed, settled down to work, and, though possessing little at present, it was certain (for Mark had told her so) that he had excellent expectations. The men of business with whom he was connected evidently appreciated him. The diamond ring, on the value of which her son had descanted with a triumph which he would certainly not have exhibited had it been his own, convinced her of this more than all that Kit had said about his prosperity. That a Board of Directors should have bestowed such a token of their regard upon a subordinate, and on such a short experience of his services, showed that they rated them highly indeed. To Mr. Penryn and others who expressed incredulity as to Kit's prospects, she always instanced the diamond ring as an argument against them.

‘Perhaps it’s paste,’ said Mr. Penryn, in his

quiet cynical way. 'Why not? What it would lose in value it would gain in significance as coming from the promoters of the Cook's Creek scheme.'

But she knew it was not paste, for Mark had seen it, and handled it, and pronounced it the finest jewel he had ever seen. Indeed, considering how Kit had resented his sister's reference to the ring on a recent occasion, it would perhaps have annoyed him to know how much it was talked about, and how greatly it outweighed their admiration of the thing it typified—namely, the prospects of the mine itself—in the minds of his old neighbours.

For her part, however, Mrs. Medway was well convinced that Kit was on the highway to fortune, and that being so, was, on the whole, by no means ill-disposed to advance his interests with her daughter. She dreaded

separation from Maud, and no other alliance could hold forth such good hopes of retaining her. The friendship that subsisted between Kit and her son, the affection of Trenna for Maud, the associations that linked both Kit and Trenna to the Knoll, all promised a life-long intimacy. As to what Mark had told her of Maud's disinclination to become Kit's wife at present, she attached but small importance to it. She understood it, indeed, to be a mere temporary objection, and thought it arose from the inopportuneness of the time. She had no suspicion of Maud's love for Frank (her ideas in that respect having always taken another direction), but she knew that she had a great regard for him, and could easily conceive that, while he was lying on what might be his death-bed, Kit's declaration had been unwelcome. Her daughter was not one to indulge in

schemes of happiness for herself while any-one she loved was in pain and peril; on the other hand, Mrs. Medway did not blame Kit, but made allowance for the selfishness that belonged to all young men (save her own Mark), and to the fact of Kit's being suddenly thrown together with Maud after a long and unwonted separation. When, therefore, Mrs. Medway began to sound her daughter's feelings with respect to Christopher Garston she did it with the result of a foregone conclusion.

‘Poor Kit went away from us, it seemed to me, very disconsolate, my dear.’

‘Indeed? He struck me as being in very good spirits about his affairs.’

‘Well, yes, as to his financial prospects, they no doubt are very much better than he could have looked for; that he should have achieved such a position in so short a time is

little short of marvellous; but in other respects he was certainly cast down.'

'I am sorry for that.' There was little pity in the tone in which the reply was uttered. The face of the speaker was cold, almost defiant. She sat with her hands clasped, looking resolutely into the fire, so as to avoid her mother's gaze.

'My darling,' said Mrs. Medway, tenderly, 'will you not be frank with me? I had hoped that you would never have a secret which I might not share.'

'A secret, mother?' exclaimed the young girl, blushing from brow to chin; 'what secret?'

'Well, has not Kit proposed to you, and have you not rejected him?'

'That is quite true,' said Maud, in a tone that was almost cheerful, so great was her

sense of relief; 'but I did not know it *was* a secret. I thought, indeed, you had come to talk about it.'

Her manner was so little like that of a young lady referring to her own possible engagement that Mrs. Medway began to mistrust her previous convictions. To find one's sagacity at fault is annoying to every one; even a mother possesses some *amour propre*.

'You know, I suppose,' she said, 'that the result of his interview with you is that Kit has left the house?'

'I did not know it, but I concluded as much. It was no use his staying here so far as I was concerned, and after what has passed his doing so would of course have been embarrassing to both of us.'

'But he gave Mark to understand that he was by no means without hope.'

‘Then he must be very sanguine—no, I don’t mean that, dear mother,’ said Maud, discarding her cold and measured tones; ‘I don’t wish to be hard on Kit. If I am cruel, as the song says, it is only to be kind; but the fact is, I can never love Christopher Garston, never, never, *never*.’

Mrs. Medway regarded her daughter with curious eyes for a moment or two, then inquired gravely, ‘You have no reason to dislike him, Maud, have you?’

‘No. I have never disliked him until to-day, and then only because he wanted me to like him otherwise than as a sister.’

‘I see.’

And she did see; her ear had detected in that reply that her daughter’s heart held the image of another man; she recognised the original, of course, at once. Who could it be

but Frank Meade? A man perhaps upon his death-bed, a man at best doomed to be an incurable invalid.

She uttered an involuntary sigh.

‘You are not angry with me, mother, because I can never marry Christopher Garston?’

‘Angry, my darling? Certainly not.’ Like Kit, she thought to herself, ‘Never is a long day. If poor Frank dies, Kit will perhaps still have his way. But in the meantime, and in any case, there would be trouble for poor Maud.

‘I see it distresses you, dear mother; I am so very sorry,’ said Maud, her eyes filling with tears.

‘No, darling, it does not distress me; at least, not on my own account.’

‘I know what you are thinking about,’

observed Maud, with a fond smile. 'You are thinking what a blow this will be for Mark, who has set his heart upon having Kit for his brother-in-law.'

Mrs. Medway inclined her head assentingly. She was very willing that her melancholy forebodings should be put down to Mark's account. It did not strike her as being rather hard that Maud should have supposed she could be thinking of any one but Maud herself. Her only thought was to save her daughter pain.

When Eve was turned out of Paradise she was not a mother ; afterwards, to make amends for the punishment inflicted on the human race, she was dowered with maternal love, but the Giver was so bounteous that instead of its being a counterpoise to original sin it outweighs it.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE WORST.

THE next day better news arrived of Frank. The crisis was over; and though complete restoration to health was not to be looked for (such was the good Doctor's report, delivered in a voice which strove to be firm in vain), he was pronounced to be out of danger. In most men's lives at one point or another there is a place where two roads meet, and a guide-post with these two inscriptions on it, 'To Life,' 'To Death;' but even when poor humanity is so fortunate as to take the former road it sometimes happens that he treads it with another

step than that by which his fellows knew him. The vigour and elasticity of his step is gone, and though fears are not in the way, as in the case of the aged, with whom 'the grasshopper is a burden,' it behoves him for the rest of his days to take heed to his going. It was the opinion of the faculty that Frank Meade would never again be the man he was, and that certain objects on which he had set his heart in connection with his profession would have to be abandoned. For one thing, it was pronounced that he must give up life in London, and return to his native air as soon as he had gathered strength to do so.

'There is at least this comfort,' said Mrs. Medway to the poor Doctor, 'we shall have dear Frank amongst us again.'

'Yes, madam,' was the grave rejoinder; 'or at least what remains of him.'

But Maud was filled with gratitude to the Giver of all good for the bare life. As to Frank's being other than himself, she knew that was impossible; he would always be the 'same man' to her.

Such is the way of women when they love us. The fallen cheek, the haggard eye, the shrunken limbs, are but so many additional reasons for their devotion; old age does not wither us in their eyes, nor disease offend them. 'Tender and true' is their constant motto, though we do our best and worst to change it.

As for the others at the Knoll, they felt as friends in such cases always do feel. They hoped the Doctor's apprehensions would prove unfounded, while they welcomed what was good in his news. They regretted that Frank's ambition should be thus nipped in the bud, but

their sorrow was greatly mitigated in the circumstance that he was about to return to them.

What greatly added to the general satisfaction was a note that came from Kit in a few days addressed to his sister. He spoke of his reception by his business friends in London as being everything that could be wished. 'They have as great confidence in me as in the scheme itself, the shares in which are, as you will see by the accompanying newspaper, already at par. I am at present only a provisional director, since no one can be placed on the Board unless he is in possession of a certain number of shares, a difficulty which, however, I hope to surmount. I am going to Paris on a special mission in a day or two, and on my return the house which I have fixed on as our residence will be set in order and ready for

your reception. How happy we shall be together, my darling! My dear love to Mark and Maud and Mrs. Medway.'

Maud was hardly less pleased with this despatch than were her mother and Mark. Now that Frank was safe, she could afford to bestow her sympathies elsewhere, nor did she resent that phrase of his 'dear love,' since it was applied to the rest, and could, therefore, have only a general significance. She felt that she had a regard for Kit almost as great and genuine as her admiration for his talents, and cordially congratulated Trenna on these good tidings. Mark was in the seventh heaven of happiness at his friend's success, and defended him from what Mrs. Medway good-humouredly described as his want of gallantry in putting Mark's name before that of herself and her daughter.

‘It is one of the few things we learn at college, dear mother, that the masculine is more worthy than the feminine, and, therefore, comes first.’

To which that lady had rejoined, with no less truth than wit, that no man need ever go to college to learn that much.

The only person, strange to say, in whom Kit’s letter did not inspire confidence, and put in good spirits concerning him, was Trenna herself.

There were certain things in his letter which troubled her, passages in which she alone read something between the lines.

‘No one can be placed on the board of directors who does not possess a certain amount of shares’ (‘in other words,’ thought she, ‘the money to buy them’), ‘a difficulty which, however, I hope to surmount.’ How

could he possibly surmount it, save by finding the money? And how was he to find it? Of course it was possible that his friend Braithwaite might advance the necessary funds; but, if so, he would surely have given some hint of it. He was always very frank with her, unless he had something to conceal, and of which he knew she would disapprove. The statement, too, that he was going to Paris 'on a special mission' filled her with vague apprehensions. Why to Paris on business connected with a mine in Cornwall? And, again, why was he silent on the nature of the mission?

Even the newspaper, with the shares of the Company quoted at par, gave her tremors as she called to mind what the Company's property looked like, and what sort of an agent represented its local interests; while the name of 'Christopher Garston, Esq., the Grey House,

Mogadion,' under the heading 'Provincial Directors' in the long advertisement of the mine, revived her old presentiments, and filled her with alarm. Why had she not fled with him when he left his father's house? What good had she done by remaining there? From what temptations, from what perils, might she not have preserved him had she been by his side to advise and restrain him?

With every day that passed by without news of him Trenna's fears increased. She wrote to his address in town, and her letter was returned to her, marked by the landlady, 'Left the house.' She wrote to the London office of the mine, and received no reply. She had almost ventured upon addressing herself to Mr. Braithwaite, but the fear of her brother's wrath restrained her. She knew not what mischief such a proceeding might do him.

The same consideration restrained her from communicating her fears to her friends at the Knoll. It was possible that after all there was nothing amiss. Kit might be even preparing a surprise for her—some brilliant piece of good fortune. And then to have to acknowledge that she had doubted of him, and had expressed her doubts in a quarter too where he wished above all to inspire confidence—‘No,’ she said, ‘he would never forgive me.’

How marvellously are some human lives bound up in one another! Not merely dependent, or intertwined, for every branch is of the family tree, and can have no separate existence; but there are some natures actually contained in others, as the kernel in the shell. It is not too much to say that in those days of suspense and terror Trenna Garston lost consciousness of her own identity, and became in

a manner Kit himself. As weeks went by, and still without a word from him, her efforts (Heaven alone knew what they cost her) to account to others for his silence began to lose their efficacy.

‘There must be something wrong,’ said Mark. ‘I shall run up to town.’

‘No, no,’ she pleaded; ‘Kit has some reason for his silence; he is sure to write to me in due course.’ If anything was wrong—that is, shamefully wrong—she felt, putting herself in Kit’s place, that Mark should be the last to know it. Little as Kit valued the world’s judgment, the good opinion of his friends at the Knoll was of paramount importance to him.

But Mark’s suspicions once aroused were difficult to allay. ‘I will give him another week,’ he said; ‘then if he still keeps silence,

nothing shall prevent me from seeing him with my own eyes. I am sure some misfortune has happened to the dear fellow.'

So was Trenna by this time, quite sure; she was prepared for the worst. She did not think he was dead (for that would not be the worst), but she respected what she knew would be his wishes as we respect those of a dead man.

When the time which Mark had assigned for the limit of his patience had almost expired there came the long-looked-for letter.

'MY DEAREST TRENNA,—Since I last wrote I have had quite a series of ludicrous misfortunes. I know how my silence must have alarmed you; but to have written about them would have given you pain. In a fortnight all will be well. But in the meantime it will be a comfort to have you with me; you will come,

I know, by to-morrow's express, and *alone*. This last proviso is absolutely necessary. I date from Braithwaite's house, who will communicate my present address to you.

‘ Always your loving

‘ KIT.’

Not a word of explanation ! Not a word about the mine ! And his very address to be communicated to her at second-hand !

‘ Good Heavens ! what can it all mean ? ’ said Mark, to whom she was obliged to show the letter ; if he had not seen Kit's own words forbidding him to accompany Trenna, no arguments of hers, she knew, could have prevented him from going with her to him.

Trenna could only shake her head ; she knew, indeed, no more than Mark what had happened to her brother ; but she could make a better guess.

Her clothes were already packed—they had been so for days in expectation of some such sudden summons; but she fled to her own room on pretence of packing them to escape the inquiries, the condolences, the apprehensions of her hostess and of Maud. To the latter she felt a positive repugnance which, at the same time, she knew to be unreasonable; it was possible that Maud's rejection of her brother had driven him to some act of desperation; at all events she had spurned him from her when he was on the brink of calamity. She shrank even from Mrs. Medway, because, when the worst should be known, Mrs. Medway might shrink from Kit. But Mark—Mark, whose cheek had turned pale, in whose eyes 'the man's rare tears' had stood as he read his friend's letter—Mark would stand by him to the last.

‘My dear, remember that you have friends here,’ said Mrs. Medway as she tenderly embraced her parting guest, ‘who will spare nothing for you and yours, and who may be depended upon whatever happens.’

‘Say everything kind to Kit for me, my darling,’ whispered Maud, as she hugged Trenna to her bosom.

But for her, these words had a false ring in them. Not that she disbelieved their sincerity, but because she felt that they were spoken in ignorance. If Kit had given way to some great temptation (as she put it to herself) a second time, would the friendship of these two women survive the shock? Would it have survived his first offence, had that ever been brought home to him? But as to Mark, he would be true to Kit through blame and shame.

He was in the pony-carriage waiting for

her at the door, for he would allow no servant to drive her to the station.

‘You must write to me to-morrow, Trenna, and tell me all,’ were his first words as they drove away.

‘I must do what is best for Kit,’ she answered gravely.

‘But how is it possible that he could wish to keep me in the dark?’

‘I do not know, Mark : I know no more than you do ; but you have read his letter. He said it was necessary that I should go to him alone. The matter—whatever it is that is the matter—is a private one.’

‘But to hide it from *me*, Trenna!’ said Mark, reproachfully. ‘I have always shared his joys, then why not his sorrows? Think of what I shall suffer, Trenna, sitting here powerless to help him, and imagining every mis-

fortune that can happen to man save the loss of honour.'

There was a long silence. Mark's last words had frozen her speech and chilled her very blood. She was quite prepared for the absence of all suspicion in Mark as regarded his friend's conduct; but this expression of confidence in his integrity, which she herself was, alas! so far from sharing, appalled her. Fond as Mark was of Kit, would his affection for him endure as hers did, should he become convinced of the unworthiness of the object? An old story she had read somewhere flitted across her mind of a man who had been accused of some terrible crime, and who was visited by two friends in prison. One of them said, 'My friend, however strong the proofs may be against you, I could never believe you guilty of this offence;' the other said, 'Whether you

are guilty or not, you are still my friend.' This latter she now thought must surely have been a woman.

The carriage drew up before the Bank in Mogadion.

'Why are you stopping here, Mark?'

'To change a cheque.'

'Not for me, I hope, Mark?'

'Yes; you must take a hundred pounds with you. I can send what more you have occasion for. You don't know what may be wanted.'

'But, Mark——'

'Good Heavens! What is money?' he interrupted vehemently. 'I am amazed at you, Trenna: suppose he wants it?'

'Then I will write for it. That I promise you. But I have enough for my own expenses.'

Kit had provided her with funds for the very purpose of taking her to town. An hour ago perhaps she would have accepted Mark's offer. But now she felt that she might be obtaining the money under false pretences; that phrase, 'save the loss of honour,' still rang in her ears; it was not Kit, but the man he had taken Kit to be, to whom he was proffering his assistance.

Mark sighed, and said no more; he knew it was useless to argue with Trenna. They parted at the station with a prolonged hand-shaking, and looks that spoke more than words.

As the train was moving slowly out of the station, and Mark walking by its side, 'You will take care of my poor Polly,' said Trenna, with trembling lips.

'Surely, surely, everything that is dear—to you and Kit—is dear to me.'

It was strange that at such a moment she should have spoken of the bird, but the fact was the idea presented itself to her like a bequest that suddenly occurs to a dying man; she had a presentiment that henceforth the Knoll would know her and hers no more. There was a tunnel just without the little town, and as the train entered it she seemed to be entering her tomb. On the other side of it she became a new woman; all weakness had passed away; resolute, devoted, unyielding, she was prepared to act and to suffer. Had she been possessed of less determination of character her case would have been piteous. They only to whom it has been allotted to take a long journey, summoned by some misfortune of the extent of which they are ignorant, can picture what she suffered during that day's travel.

It was dark when she reached London. She took a cab, and drove straight to the house where Mr. Braithwaite the elder lived: it was in Portman Square. As the door opened and she was ushered into the hall—looking so huge and sepulchral by contrast with the little vestibule at the Knoll—a chill ran through her blood, her limbs trembled, and her face seemed to straighten and grow rigid. On one side of the hall was a half-opened door, giving ingress to some well-lighted apartment, from which came the clatter of knives and forks and the tumult of conversation. She shrank back from it in alarm, for something told her that Kit was not there, nor in any such scene of social enjoyment.

‘This way, Miss,’ said the footman, ushering her into a small room on the opposite side of the hall. ‘My master will be with you

immediately.' At the same time there was a cessation of the noise in the dining-room. She heard some one say in a voice half jocular, half sympathetic, 'I don't envy you your office, Braithwaite.'

There was a heavy step over the tiled floor, and the master of the house presented himself to her—a big, burly man, with shaggy eyebrows and a heavy face. With one hand he was playing nervously with a gold chain which hung across his white waistcoat; the other he held out to her—not unkindly.

Sit down, Miss Garston.'

'I had rather stand,' she murmured. She felt that if she allowed herself the least relaxation she must needs break down.

'I am very sorry about your brother,' he said; he has pained us all, and of course has

done great mischief to us. But we wish him no harm—believe me.’

‘What has he done, sir?’

‘Good Heavens! is it possible he has not told you?’

‘He has told me nothing; only that I was to call here to learn his address.’

‘You mean the address of the lodgings that have been taken for you,’ he answered with a strange look. ‘I have seen to that myself; a most respectable woman, my own tenant, has orders to take every care of you: she lives in Ludgate Hill. That is the number.’ And he gave her a card.

‘And my brother?’

‘Roberts,’ cried the old gentleman in a loud voice, ‘bring a glass of wine here at once—port wine—the thirty-four port.’

The wine was brought, and Mr. Braithwaite held it out to her. She shook her head.

‘Where is he?’ she murmured.

‘My poor girl! You will see him to-morrow morning. I have arranged all that for you with the Governor. You will be quite close to him.’

‘Where—*where* is he?’

‘He is in Newgate Prison.’

CHAPTER XLV.

NOT TO BE CONVINCED.

THERE are two ways of living out of the world while one is still *of* it. The one is to be bed-ridden; the other is to be in prison. As in health we rarely dream of the one case, so in honour we hardly think of the other. But one man's life overlaps that of his fellows without dovetailing, and the affairs of others become our own, whether we will or no. It would have seemed incredible that to that innocent household at the Knoll the subject of crime should ever become familiar. Yet it came to pass that, though little was talked about it (for

the topic was too painful), little else was thought about for weeks and months by every member of the family ; and with one of them Time the Healer brought no ‘surcease of pain.’

On the morning after Trenna’s departure Dr. Meade dropped in upon his professional rounds, and met Mark at the entrance-gate.

‘I have good news from town, my lad, this morning,’ cried the visitor cheerfully.

‘Thank Heaven for that,’ answered Mark, with brightening face. ‘What is it?’

‘Well, they say we shall have him down here in a week at farthest.’

‘Indeed!’ exclaimed Mark, wondering why in that case Kit had sent for Trenna. But who are “they”?’

‘Well, the doctors, of course. Mogadion air will no doubt be his best specific, and they

predict he will be fit to travel—if he keeps his present rate of progress—by this day week. But you must expect to see the poor lad changed, Mark.’

‘He will be the same to us, and more welcome than ever,’ answered Mark, kindly ; but his heart reproached him for the duplicity of his lips. What he said, indeed, was true enough ; but his mind was so full of Kit that up to that moment he had not given a thought to Frank, or suspected that it was he of whom the other spoke.

‘You will tell your mother and Maud, as I have no time to stop,’ continued the Doctor ; ‘and I am sure Trenna will be as pleased as either of them.’

Trenna had become a favourite with the Doctor since his interview with her on her exodus from the Grey House ; and, it may be

added, since he had become convinced that his son had no matrimonial intentions in that quarter.

Mark was so sick with disappointment that he suffered the Doctor to go upon his way without the information that Trenna had left the Knoll. Hardly had his fast-trotting cob trotted away than the Rector drove up to the door. His face was sad, and the tone was very grave in which he asked the old servant whether Mark was at home.

‘I wish to see him,’ he said, ‘in private.’

He was at once ushered into the dining-room.

‘You have news of Kit,’ cried Mark, directly he saw his face; ‘bad news?’

‘Well, yes. Were you expecting any?’

‘I was.’

‘Thank Heaven! It will not, then, be such

a blow to you as I expected. Where is poor Trena ?’

‘She is gone to join her brother.’

‘Impossible !’

‘What do you mean? Do you suppose she would not join him, whatever was the matter? Do you suppose *I* shall not join him? What *is* the matter? Are you dumb?’

‘Then he does not know, after all,’ muttered the Rector. ‘Well, it is a long story, Mark, as well as a very, very sad one. I read it this morning in the paper here. It may not be true, you know. Let us hope it is not; but——’

Mark had snatched the newspaper from the Rector’s hand, and his eye had caught the fatal heading, ‘Committal of Christopher Garston, a City Director, to Newgate for Felony.’

‘It is false,’ he cried; ‘false as hell.’

The expression coming from such a mouth as Mark's had tenfold its intensity.

‘Hush, hush,’ said his old tutor, reprovingly.

But Mark did not hear him. He pulled out his watch, and thrust it back again into his pocket. ‘The express has gone; there are twelve hours lost,’ he cried despairingly.

‘It is quite as well, Mark, that you have some time to think before you act,’ observed the Rector, gravely.

‘What? You think him guilty,’ answered the other vehemently. ‘You were always ready to think badly of him. That is because you do not know Christopher Garston. He has not been your friend, as he has been mine. You do not owe your life, your honour, to him as I do. As for wrong-doing, Kit is incapable of it. I would rather believe it of myself; the

thing is monstrous. Yet what must the dear fellow be suffering? My poor dear Kit!’

‘You had better read what is said about him, Mark—nay, what is proved about him.’

‘What do I care what knaves may swear and fools may write? Let them puff against him; Kit “stands four-square to every wind that blows.”’

‘Still, you have not read it.’

With an exclamation of disgust and contempt Mark held the newspaper at arm’s length before him, and read as follows:—

‘On Tuesday last Christopher Garston, Manager of the Cook’s Creek Mining Company, and a provisional director of it, was charged at the Guildhall with stealing property of great value from Mr. Flesker, the well-known jeweller of Lombard Street. The prosecutor stated that in November last the prisoner had called in a

carriage in company with a lady, and had some conversation with him on the subject of precious stones. He had selected a diamond of great beauty and rarity, to which also an historical value was attached, being, as was supposed, one of *Les Douzes Mazarins*, once belonging to the crown of France. It weighed no less than seventeen carats, and the sum at which he (Mr. Flesker) offered it for sale was 2,000*l*. The prisoner said that it was beyond his means, and contented himself with purchasing a few trifling articles which he requested to be sent to him to the care of Mr. Braithwaite, a well-known merchant in the City, but residing in Portman Square. The mention of Mr. Braithwaite's name would have been in itself sufficient to do away with all suspicion, but the prisoner's manners impressed the prosecutor so favourably; the lady, of middle age, but very fashionably

attired, who accompanied him, appeared so respectable; and the carriage in which they came was so well appointed; that in fact no suspicion entered into his mind. The lady herself took little interest in the purchases, but gave her attention to a handsome camellia which happened to be standing in a china jar in the prosecutor's window. Before leaving the shop the prisoner asked once again to see the diamond, and on Mr. Flesker opening the drawer, into which, as he felt confident, he had placed it after its previous examination, he found that the jewel was missing. Nothing could exceed the anxiety and chagrin evinced by the two visitors. They assisted in the search with the utmost apparent concern, and on its proving fruitless the prisoner thus expressed himself: "You will be good enough, Mr. Flesker, to send to the office in the City of

which I am manager, and where Mr. Braithwaite will be found, to prove my identity, and in the meantime I insist upon this lady and myself being searched in order to satisfy your own mind."

'His wishes were accordingly complied with. Mr. Flesker himself thoroughly searched the prisoner, while the housekeeper performed the same office for the lady: but the diamond was not in the possession of either of them. A clerk from Mr. Braithwaite's presently arrived, who proved that Mr. Garston was the person he had represented himself to be, and all suspicion of the prisoner was removed from Mr. Flesker's mind.

'The next day the prisoner came again, alone, to inquire whether the missing jewel had been discovered. He expressed the deepest sorrow for what had happened, and spoke of the

lady, a dear old friend, as being seriously indisposed on account of what had happened. "It is very hard upon her," he said, "who came here at my request, and for whom jewels have no attraction. She would rather have a camellia such as that than the finest diamond in the world, and, if you have no objection, I should like to buy it for her." The prosecutor stated that flower was not for sale, but since the lady had fallen in love with it, and was undergoing such unmerited suffering, he was very willing that she should have it. The prisoner objected that he could accept no favour of Mr. Flesker while he was labouring under such a calamity as the loss of the diamond, which, moreover, must seem connected in some way with his own previous visit, but in the end he took the flower with the china jar in which it stood. But it was now the theory

of the prosecution that, as the prisoner's accomplice, this woman had contrived to steal the diamond, and to place it, while pretending to admire the camellia, in the mould of the pot, so that she had eventually become possessed of the stolen property by the prosecutor's own act.

‘For a long time, however, the whole affair was shrouded in mystery, till early in the present month, when the missing diamond once more made its appearance under the following circumstances:—

‘An elderly stout man, an Englishman, called at the shop of M. Baine, a jeweller, in the Rue Vivien, Paris, and took from his scarf a small gold pin, with a very handsome diamond, which he offered for sale. The pooriness of the setting—for the pin itself was almost valueless, in comparison with the

richness of the gem—attracted the jeweller's attention.

“You wish to have this reset, I suppose,” he observed.

“On the contrary,” returned the stranger, “I wish to sell it, if I can do so at a good figure. It was an heirloom in my family, and I do not know its exact value, but I am told it is worth a great deal of money.”

‘To this M. Baine assented. “Indeed it is worth so much that I cannot tell you its value off-hand,” he said; “moreover, I have very few customers for such a jewel.”

‘What passed through his mind was that the stranger hardly seemed of a rank to have become possessed of such a diamond by inheritance, and that at all events he should not feel justified in bidding for it without further inquiries.

“In that case,” said the stranger, “you

had better keep the pin for a few days, when I will call again and hear how much you are prepared to give for it ; I shall not, however, part with it under 1,400*l*."

'Whereupon he departed, leaving the pin behind him, and giving his address as " Mr. Shaw," lodging at the Hôtel de Suisse, which was in the neighbourhood.

'Every jeweller of repute keeps a ledger, in which is set down a description of any jewel of note which has fallen into bad hands—they are almost as difficult, indeed, to pass as are stolen notes, of which the numbers are posted at every Bank—and M. Baine had a book of this description. At the first glance at the diamond he had his suspicion that he had seen it described in the book in question, and further investigation of it convinced him of the fact. Its weight and appearance coincided exactly with

the description of the jewel stolen from Lombard Street during the previous November. He accordingly telegraphed at once to Mr. Flesker, who came to Paris the next day, identified the diamond as his property, and put himself in connection with the French police; from that time a detective was always on the watch at M. Baine's establishment; he remained in a back room in company with Mr. Flesker, awaiting the reappearance of Mr. Shaw. This room had a glass door which looked into the shop. In a week after the ring had been left in the jeweller's hands, an Englishman—the prisoner, Christopher Garston—called, requesting to look at some large diamonds. He was shown the one in question, and expressed a wish to purchase it. The sum which M. Baine had decided to ask for it was 1,500*l.*; this the prisoner undertook to give. Upon being told

that the owner had left the jewel on sale, he left his name and address, and promised he would return on the morrow to complete the purchase, supposing that the terms should be agreeable to Mr. Shaw. On leaving the shop he was arrested at the instance of Mr. Flesker, who had recognised him through the glass door.

‘What had happened was just what the police had anticipated. They were convinced, since Shaw had failed to sell the diamond in the first instance, that some confederate of his would call and bid for it, and, having done so, Shaw would calculate upon getting the money *minus* M. Baine’s commission. There would have been no reason why the jeweller should hesitate, since, even if the intending purchaser should break his promise, the jewel would remain in his possession, while the price he had paid for it was far below its value.

There would have been a difficulty, under the French law, in arresting the prisoner as a confederate, but for Mr. Flesker's identification of him with the man who had been connected with the original disappearance of the diamond. As soon as he was in custody, however, many corroborative circumstances came to light. In the first place, Shaw was missing; he had left his hotel that very morning and had not returned for his luggage; it was, therefore, reasonably argued that he had been aware of Garston's visit to the jeweller, and was cognisant—had possibly been even a witness—of his capture. The landlord of the Hôtel de Suisse proved that Garston had visited Shaw on several occasions. The name that Garston had given was a false one, under which he was residing in very splendid apartments at the Grand Hotel. Under these circumstances a warrant had been

procured and the prisoner taken to London. What was especially dwelt upon by the prosecution was the nature and appearance of the diamond, which it was impossible that any one acquainted with such matters, as the prisoner by his own admission was proved to be, could mistake. Yet, when M. Baine had offered it to him for sale, he had made no sign of recognition of it, and put questions that would seem to imply an utter ignorance of its peculiarities. Then, again, it was shown that the prisoner when he went to Paris was short of money; had certainly not one thousand five hundred pounds in his possession, nor anything approaching to that sum, and that he was in especial need of one thousand pounds for the purpose of purchasing certain shares in the Cook's Creek Mine, the proprietorship of which would qualify him as a Director of the Company. The

evidence on this part of the matter had been obtained with difficulty, and was damaging to the interests of the Mine itself. The Company, on the whole, had stuck by their manager; Mr. Braithwaite, in particular, had expressed his fullest confidence in the prisoner's innocence, and had even offered to become his bail.

‘But such was the mass of testimony against him, and so serious the offence with which he was charged, that bail had been refused.’

Such, in brief, was the narrative which Mark Medway read in the paper before him; but it scarcely produced a more distinct impression upon his brain than some evil dream leaves on the waking sense. As in that case, too, the latest impression was the strongest. Mark found himself repeating aloud the last words of the report. ‘The prisoner, who was undefended, maintained a resolute demeanour,

and when asked whether he had anything to say in answer to the charge, observed smilingly that "it seemed useless for the present to say anything; but that he had never had possession of Mr. Flesker's diamond, save when that gentleman had himself placed it in his hand."

'What a frightful mistake! What a terrible position for poor dear Kit!' ejaculated Mark, looking at the Rector with horror-struck eyes.

'A terrible position, indeed,' assented Mr. Penryn.

'It could be hardly worse if he were guilty,' continued the young man, striding up and down the room excitedly. 'Only conceive what a proud spirit like his must have suffered! And yet he would not pain us by one word of it; it was only at the very last he sent for

Trenna, and even then he did not reveal the truth.'

'Just so,' said the Rector, naïvely. 'It would have spared you all a great shock, and been better for everybody, if he had been more open.'

'But what was there to be open about?' inquired Mark, indignantly. 'The whole affair is a series of unfortunate coincidences. Kit never had the diamond in his possession, save for an instant when Mr. Flesker himself placed it in his hands. Those are his very words.'

'He had *a* diamond in his possession,' observed the Rector, quietly, 'of a very peculiar kind and of great value; you told me so yourself.'

'Certainly,' admitted Mark with vehemence. 'I have seen it. It was given to him by the

Board of Management of his Company. Though they had not known him so long as other people I could mention, they were better judges of his character, and had the fullest confidence in his integrity.'

'Heaven grant that it may not have been misplaced,' said the Rector, fervently.

'I have not the slightest apprehension of that kind,' was the cold reply; 'any suggestion to the contrary, born of malice and ill-nature, is most offensive to me, nor under this roof, at all events, will I permit it to be uttered.'

'Mark, Mark, you mistake me altogether,' returned the Rector, with heightened colour. 'Heaven knows that neither malice nor ill-nature are actuating me. I am as desirous that Christopher Garston may prove himself innocent of this disgraceful charge as you can be. But what are the facts?'

‘I do not wish to discuss them, Mr. Penryn,’ said Mark, coldly. ‘I will not hear, I will not know, the man who would distort them to my friend’s prejudice.’

‘Distort them—why, bless my soul!—but here is your mother.’

That lady had entered the room, attracted by her son’s loud tones, and was gazing from one to the other of the two actors in this little drama in stupefied amazement.

‘My dear Mrs. Medway, I must ask you to judge between me and Mark. I will not plead my own cause, but simply refer you to that newspaper. I am not Christopher Garston’s accuser, but it surely justifies me——’

Mark snatched the paper, and tore it in a dozen pieces. ‘My mother’s mind shall not be poisoned by any such lies,’ he exclaimed. ‘If this was my own house, Mr. Penryn, I should

ask you to leave it; as it is my mother's, not mine, I can only take the next best course open to me.'

Whereupon he walked out of the room, closing the door behind him.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE SUBPŒNA.

MR. PENRYN, though a divine, was human, and poor Mark's injudicious advocacy of his friend's interests did not certainly induce the Rector to take a more favourable view of Kit's position. He stated his opinion upon that matter to Mrs. Medway without any of the doubts and aspirations he had previously employed in the way of mitigation ; and having pieced together the fragments of the newspaper, arranged them on the table, and bade that lady use her own reason. It was as though the judge's summing-up should precede the evidence, and was

certainly not a fair way of putting the case; but then, when we are angry, few of us are fair.

Mrs. Medway, thus manipulated, began by asserting that Kit's guilt was incredible and impossible, then took the lower ground of 'she would never have thought it,' and eventually assented to the general proposition that 'people are not committed to Newgate, without bail, for nothing.'

In her mother's heart she resented the long intimacy of this guilt-smirched man (for such he already was, whatever happened) with her dear ones, and especially his late attempt (which now seemed both desperate and audacious) to win her daughter's love. But nevertheless she felt great distress and pity for the young fellow.

'It may be a mistake, Mr. Penryn,' she

pleaded, ‘after all, you know, and he was so pleasant and charming that we all loved him. Nor was it only that,’ she added, when the Rector pursed his lips and shook his head (as though he would have said, ‘it was the serpent’s beauty, and not the fruit, which tempted Eve’), ‘but he has laid us under the greatest obligations.’

‘To be sure. I remember he saved Maud from drowning. That was certainly a feather in his cap. No one denies his courage, however. Indeed, throughout this affair’ (here he pointed to the newspaper) ‘we find Danton’s—was it Danton’s?—advice in practice, *l’audace, et l’audace, et toujours l’audace.*’

It is strange when a man is down how his very virtues are quoted to his disadvantage; but that was not the reflection which occurred to Mrs. Medway.

There was another matter, she said, equally to Kit's credit (she was thinking of Mark's love affair), and in which he had done her and hers the greatest service.

'Oh, indeed,' said the Rector, who was so far gone in partisanship by this time that if he had had the facts before him he would probably have suggested that Kit had wanted to marry Miss Finch himself.

'No doubt Christopher Garston had his good points. Otherwise he would not have obtained such influence—an influence I have always deprecated—over your son.'

This thrust, which was intended for a body blow, had not altogether the effect intended upon its object.

'To be sure; that of itself is a certificate of Kit's good principle; he must be right in the main. It is therefore impossible—however black things look against him——'

‘*Look* against him ! He is committed to Newgate.’

‘Great Heavens—yes—I had forgotten—poor dear Trenna !’ Here, to the Rector’s amazement, Mrs. Medway burst into tears.

Self-reproach had suddenly seized her, for the truth was, in her excitement upon Kit’s account, and on that of her son, the fact of Trenna’s having gone to join her brother had for the moment escaped her memory. ‘She left us yesterday, thinking he was in lodgings somewhere ; think of that unhappy girl alone in London.’

‘Alone, and her brother in gaol !’ exclaimed the Rector. ‘This is indeed terrible news. Do you know her address ?’

Mrs. Medway nodded ; speechless with excitement, but by no means stupefied, she was ransacking her desk for a telegraph form.

‘What are you going to do?’ he inquired.

‘I shall let her know, of course, that help and friends are coming at once—to-morrow.’

‘Quite right—a noble woman. Be so good as to say that if my presence can be of the least service to her—she used to despise us poor parsons, but we are not so unmindful of our duties as she imagines—I will come to her willingly, gladly.’

‘I am sure you would, Mr. Penryn; but Mark will of course accompany myself and Maud. Nothing would keep him here with Kit in trouble elsewhere.’

‘Just so; but why not wait for the second post? No time will be lost by doing that, since Trenna will be sure to write.’

This reasonable suggestion was adopted, and in the meantime Mrs. Medway and her daughter began to make their preparations for

departure. Mark had already communicated to his sister what had happened, accompanied by many vehement invectives against the witnesses, the magistrates, and the law itself. ‘Of course,’ he ended, ‘I shall go to town by the next express.’

‘And of course mamma and I will go with you, Mark,’ was Maud’s reply. ‘Your thoughts are engrossed by Kit, as well they may be, poor fellow ; but we must not forget that dear Trenna has not a friend in London.’

‘Quite true ; my mother will go, of course—but you——’

‘And why not *I*?’ put in the girl, indignantly. ‘I should be ashamed to stay here in comfort, while Trenna is in distress and her brother in danger.’

‘You are thinking of Trenna more than of

poor Kit, though,' sighed Mark, reproachfully. He had been distressed and pained by Maud's rejection of his friend, which had been communicated to him by his mother, and, now that Kit was in such great and unmerited trouble, the recollection of it was wormwood.

'You do me wrong, Mark,' said Maud, with dignity. 'I would do anything to serve the man who saved my life, and who is my brother's friend; and I can serve him best by serving Trenna.'

Mark was touched, and thanked her. Still it was little better than instinct in a nature such as Maud's to stand by a wronged and innocent man; what he would have preferred to hear from her lips was an avowal of her love, which he well knew would be the greatest solace and pledge of loyalty he could convey to Kit. If he had suspected Maud's attachment to Frank Meade,

he would certainly have attributed her willingness to go to town to another cause to that which in truth animated her. His affection for Kit was such that he was not at present in a condition to judge any one whose interests or prejudices were in any way opposed to him; and so bitterly did he resent the want of faith expressed by his old friend and tutor in Kit's integrity, that he would not go downstairs till the Rector had left the house.

By the evening's post, as Mr. Penryn had anticipated, there arrived a letter from Trenna: the fact of its being addressed to Mark aroused no surprise, for though, under ordinary circumstances, she might have been expected to have written to her late hostess, or to Maud, the condition of affairs, and Mark's known affection for her brother, sufficiently explained her choice. The contents of the letter, however,

though marked 'Private and confidential,' were evidently intended for the whole family, and filled them with the utmost amazement and alarm.

'Care of Mrs. Tindall, Ludgate Hill.

'MY DEAR MARK,—I send you a newspaper, which will relate the great calamity which has befallen my dearest brother, without explaining or accounting for it. Neither can I here explain it, but must needs trust to your great love and knowledge of him to form a just conclusion. I must trust to them likewise for something more.

'I know that your first thought on learning where he is, and in what strait, will prompt your coming to town; and it is just possible that the kind hearts of your dear mother and sister may prompt them too, for my sake, if

not for his, to adopt a similar course. It may be presumption in me to anticipate this, but I am compelled to presuppose such a contingency since it is *absolutely necessary and essential to his interests* that you do not do so. I have seen him and talked to him; we were watched by his gaolers, but not overheard, and I know the secrets of his heart. If he saw you, Mark, it would be his destruction. When he is once again a free man, and able to take your hand in the old way, he will be blest indeed; but at present he is wholly unequal to such an interview. His great comfort is to picture you in the old home, and under the old circumstances; to think of your being within the shadow of his present abode, or near it, would be terrible to him. He adjures you, and I entreat you, to spare him that pang. As for myself, I require no companionship, and least

of all that of your dear ones. I could not bear it. My heart is fully occupied, and I need not say my thoughts. Kit has a solicitor and counsel. He bids me say that in a fortnight he confidently hopes to cleanse his good name in the eyes of all whose good opinion is worth having; but in the meantime it is all important that his brain should be kept clear. He feels that if once he gave way to feeling he could not be answerable for his senses. I do not know whether I make myself intelligible; but what I would say, if I knew how, is something that would keep you all at the Knoll. For Heaven's sake do not come hither! It is only a fortnight—less than a fortnight—to wait. Then, his innocence established, he will fly to the arms of him who is dearer to him than any brother. But if'—here ensued a mass of blots and erasures—'if it should happen otherwise, if

through a most unhappy conjunction of circumstances (some, alas! owing to his own folly and imprudence) he should fail in proving his innocence, be assured he will not disgrace you by reminding the world of your ancient friendship for him. What have I written? I know not. You must make allowance for my troubled mind. Only one thing comes uppermost in it—because Kit impressed it upon me with such force—that you are not to come; that you are *none* of you to come. I shall see him every day. My whole life seems passed outside my body, but I believe I am well cared for. Nobody, thank Heaven, is kind—kindness I could not endure; but there is no lack of service. We have money enough. Do not think me ungrateful, my dear ones, when I say I do not wish to hear from you. I must keep strong and vigilant up to the day of the trial.

I need not say, "do not speak of all this to others." It will be, I know, a subject far too painful to you for discussion. I am afraid that from your kind and faithful hearts the thought of us will never be absent. No words are necessary to assure me of that; and above all do not come.

‘Your affectionate,

‘TRENNA GARSTON.’

This hurried scrawl, blotted with tears, was so different from her usual clerkly hand that it could only be recognised here and there as Trenna's own. Wherever she impressed upon her friends the inadvisability of their joining her it was legible and distinct enough, and therein it typified her thoughts, which, vague and troubled on all other matters, seemed, on that point, to be firm and unwavering. The effect upon Mark's hearers, for he read the

letter to his mother and Maud aloud, as well as their tears and ejaculations of pity would permit him, was most painful and perplexing. As to himself, his heart seemed to stand still with horror and amazement, for the one thing—save that astounding veto, which stood up bare and clear as a rock amid those wandering words—was the possibility that Kit might fail to prove his innocence.

Of that innocence Maud doubted no more than Mark himself, and her mother only a little less. The misery of the young man's position appealing to the latter's tender heart naturally affected her judgment, which, indeed, had been altogether in his favour till overborne by the Rector's arguments; much of their weight had been due to his personal pressure, and, being removed, her mind sprang back like a bent sapling to its old position. At the same time

she could make all allowance for those on whom the effect of the newspaper report was overwhelming. She wished above all things that Kit's good name should be established ; but Mark's behaviour to Mr. Penryn had much distressed her, and she was loth to lose so old a friend on a matter which was, after all, one of opinion.

‘ You and I, my dear Mark,’ she said (with so much stretching of the actual facts as proclaimed her woman), ‘ are of course convinced of dear Kit's integrity, but, while standing by him to the uttermost, it is only common charity, I think, to make allowance for the views of those by whom he was less known.’

‘ Mr. Penryn, mother,’ answered Mark, coldly, ‘ if you mean him, knew Kit well enough, and common charity (since you have

invoked it) should have taught any man, far more a clergyman, to express himself with less rancour.'

'I am sure, dear Mark, Mr. Penryn did not intend to be rancorous.'

'Then he was so without intending it, which looks worse for his heart.'

'Now to think how prejudice may distort the dearest and the kindest!' sighed Mrs. Medway. 'I could tell you something about Mr. Penryn—but there, I suppose it's no use.'

She waited in hopes he would inquire what were the mitigating circumstances in the Rector's crime, but Mark kept an obstinate silence. He was only interested in one man, and in one crime.

'I can only say,' she continued, 'that Mr. Penryn offered to go to town himself, if by so

doing he could be of the least comfort to poor Kit.'

'Mr. Penryn offered to go to town!' exclaimed Mark, quickly. 'Why did you not tell me that, mother?'

'Because, my dear Mark, you snap one's nose off so. You are not yourself since this terrible news came.'

'If Mr. Penryn offered to go to town to serve Kit,' reiterated Mark, 'I am sorry I said what I did to him.'

'There is my own boy again,' exclaimed Mrs. Medway, rapturously. 'The next time the Rector calls, I know that you will take his hand as usual.'

She privately resolved that the Rector should call the very next day, and, indeed, at once wrote to him to that effect. Notwithstanding the sympathy which she had described

him as having shown for Kit, she did not forget to remind him of the peril in which the young man stood. 'It almost drives Mark wild to think of it,' she wrote, 'which must be his excuse for having been so abrupt in his manner to you to-day.'

('Abrupt in his manner!' cried the Rector.)

'He was not himself,' continued the lady's letter.

('Perhaps not,' muttered Mr. Penryn, sardonically, 'and the other man that he became nearly kicked me out of the house.')

But, nevertheless, his heart was touched by his old friend's appeal, and he drove over to the Knoll the next morning. As it happened he fell in with Dr. Meade, bound for the same destination. The news of Kit's arrest was by this time on every tongue, and he

guessed what distress and alarm it would arouse in the Medways.

‘I shall go up to town to-morrow,’ said the Doctor. ‘It will be quite as well to bring Frank down with me, instead of letting him come alone, and that will give me the opportunity of seeing after poor Trenna. It is terrible to think what that unhappy girl must be suffering.’

‘But the Medways themselves are going,’ said the Rector. ‘Mrs. Medway told me so.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Why, surely you are not surprised at that, Meade?’

The Doctor did not reply, and by that time they had reached the Knoll. Both visitors received a hearty welcome. In the Rector’s case Mark felt he had something to make up in the way of friendliness; while the Doctor’s

announcement (which he made at once) of his intention to go to London 'to kill two birds with one stone,' as he called it, but in truth, as they well understood, mainly out of care for Trenna, turned all hearts towards him.

'It will not alter my intention, since I have made up my mind to do it,' he said, 'but I hear you are going up yourselves. "In the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom."'

There was a little pause, and then Maud observed: 'The fact is, we are *not* going. We have had a letter from Trenna, and she does not wish it.'

'Does not wish it!' ejaculated the Rector. 'Why not?'

'Well, the reason is obvious enough, I should think,' said Mark, curtly. 'She requires all her fortitude and judgment, and shrinks

from any show of tenderness. The letter is marked "Private," but that is the sense of it.'

Nothing more was said upon that head; indeed Mark's manner forbade it. But when the two visitors had taken their leave, and once more found themselves alone together, the Rector's amazement burst forth in a flood.

'What can Trenna mean, Meade, by not wishing the Medways to come up to her? I should have thought in such a crisis she would have absolutely yearned for kindness and sympathy.'

'It is not she that does not want them,' replied the other, confidently; 'it is her wretched brother.'

'And why not?'

'Well, I think I know why not. I may be wrong, of course, and therefore will give

no reasons, but if Lawyer Garston were here he would enlighten you, I think, upon that matter. As for us, in my opinion we can only do one thing for this unhappy young fellow.'

'What is it? I am sure I will do it with all my heart,' said the Rector, earnestly.

'Hold our tongues,' answered the Doctor, sententiously. 'The less we talk about Kit Garston within the next ten days the better it will be for him.'

Six hours afterwards the following mysterious circumstance took place. As the shades of evening were falling a strange gentleman in black called at the Knoll, and inquired if Mark Medway was within. Upon receiving from the servant an answer in the affirmative, he observed: 'Well, there is no particular necessity that I should see him; but mind you

give him this, because it is very particular.' With that he vanished, not indeed in a flame of fire, but with equal celerity.

The arrival of this missive agitated Mark exceedingly—everything that happened now moved on one hinge, and the Unknown had by this time become a thing to be dreaded—and it was some time before he could even comprehend the nature of its contents. They were precise, however, and formal enough. The communication consisted of an oblong slip of paper; on one side the name of a City solicitor, on the other certain printed matter :—

‘Victoria, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom, to Mark Medway and John Doe, and to every one of them, greeting. We command you and every of you that, laying aside all excuses and pretences whatsoever, you and every of you personally be and appear

before our Justices of Oyer and Terminer and Gaol Delivery at the Sessions to be holden for the jurisdiction of the Central Criminal Court at Justice Hall in the Old Bailey on Monday, the tenth day of March, by nine of the clock in the forenoon of the same day, there to testify the truth, and give evidence according to the best of your knowledge on our behalf against Christopher Garston, upon an indictment for felony.'

In plain English (which was a very different matter), Mark Medway had received a subpœna to attend Kit's trial on behalf of the prosecution.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ADVISERS.

THERE is something in the jargon of the law, independent of its subtleties and pretences, its juggling and delays, which is peculiarly offensive to the man of culture. Its prolixities and repetitions, the purpose of which he knows, whatever excuses may be made for them, is, at bottom, greed, disgust him. Its rank undergrowth of verbiage excites his scorn, but also exhales a certain unwholesomeness like the matted mangroves of the tropics. His walk of life is apart from such things, and he shuns them with contempt, indeed, but also

with a certain sense of fear. He has an exaggerated notion of the power of the law for harm, even in the case of an innocent man.

Under any circumstances, therefore, the receipt of a subpoena would have perturbed Mark Medway exceedingly; but as the matter stood, to find himself retained, as it were, on the other side, against his beloved friend, and he in peril of what was dearer to him than life itself, drove him to the verge of distraction. As soon as he understood the full nature of the calamity that had befallen him, a special messenger was despatched for both the Doctor and Mr. Penryn, with a few lines from Mrs. Medway (for Mark was quite unequal to composing a concise statement) to tell them what had occurred and to entreat their presence. They had both, as we know,

been at the Knoll already that day, but Mrs. Medway was well assured they would not hesitate to obey her summons. Indeed, in the Doctor's case, since he was to leave for London on the next morning, it was essential that he should know what had happened before his departure.

It was far into the night, however, before the wheels of the Mogadion fly, which the pair had chartered between them, gladdened the anxious ears of the family at the Knoll. The Doctor had been out when the messenger had called, and Mr. Penryn had had to wait for him at the Dovecote for hours. Even when he came they had had some talk together, the result of which was that they had paid a visit to Mr. Tennant, the lawyer, on their way. It was characteristic of the two men that, in the time of trouble, such as they

knew this would be to their friends at the Knoll, their mutual antagonism was forgotten. Their only thought was how to mitigate the common calamity, though, as it happened, they took different views as to how it was to be met. Kind, easy-going Mr. Penryn, who accepted in rather a broad sense the Scriptural view that the criminal law was for evil-doers of the baser class, and not for the annoyance of educated and well-born persons, was for shirking the disagreeableness of the situation; while the Doctor, who had a more robust sense of justice, was for taking the bull by the horns, and their difference of opinion had suggested their call upon the attorney, who had strengthened the one in his view of the matter by his approval, and the other by his opposition.

‘How good and kind this is of you,’ cried

Mark, holding his hands out to both of them, that to the Rector with especial warmth, in silent confession of having misjudged him.

‘Pooh, pooh,’ said Mr. Penryn, ‘a friend should show himself friendly, or what is the good of him?’

‘As for me,’ said the Doctor, ‘I am used to night work, and, putting sorrow for sickness, I look upon this as a professional visit. A subpœna is no doubt a troublesome complaint, and rather catching, but you mustn’t all look as if the plague had broken out.’

Indeed the appearance of Mrs. Medway and her daughter, as well as of Mark himself, was most deplorable. The two former had evidently been weeping bitterly, while there was something in Mark’s face which to the Doctor’s eye was much more significant of ill than tears. What was also symptomatic of Mark’s

condition was his feverish impatience. Though ordinarily phlegmatic and averse to motion, he now paced the room as a ship-captain walks his deck, nor throughout the discussion that ensued, though he took part in it by fits and starts, did he once take a seat like the rest. Whenever there was a pause he could be heard muttering to himself, 'There to testify the truth and give evidence according to your knowledge,' as though it were a spell.

'After all,' said the Doctor, when the matter had been talked over in that earnest but desultory style which belongs to feeling rather than logic, 'it cannot be difficult for a man like you, Mark, to tell the truth.'

'The truth!' echoed Mark, impatiently. 'I have nothing to tell. They know that I have nothing. It is a trap to catch poor Kit, and they have set me to do it. Then the

horror of it ! Even to *appear* to be against dear Kit. I can never do it.'

'If I were you I shouldn't attempt to do it,' said the Rector, disdainfully.

'But how is Mark to help it, my dear Mr. Penryn?' inquired Mrs. Medway.

'Merely by paying forfeit. What does the thing say?' (thus he spoke of the missive of his Lady the Queen). 'Here it is: "And this you or any of you—(why not every of you, by-the by, like the other rubbish?)—are not to omit under the penalty of one hundred pounds to be levied on the goods and chattels, lands and tenements of such of you as shall fail therein." Well, let them levy. Take yourself out of the jurisdiction of the Court'—(a phrase that the Rector had had suggested to him, one may conclude, by somebody else)—'and don't come back to it till it's all over.'

‘What is a hundred pounds to you in comparison with all this worry and annoyance?’

For an instant Mark’s face lit up with joy, but the next moment all was dark again.

‘But would that be good for Kit?’ he murmured.

‘The point is, what is your duty?’ observed the Doctor, drily.

‘One may be an honest man and yet not Marcus Junius Brutus,’ observed the Rector.

Mark stood still, and gazed from one to the other in distressful doubt. The allusion to his classical namesake, it was evident, had been thrown away upon him.

‘What I asked you,’ he said reproachfully, ‘was what will be best for Kit?’

‘I answer,’ replied the Doctor, ‘to do your duty. Do you think it will help Kit with the jury to hear that a subpœnaed witness for the

prosecution has fled the country? They will think—and naturally think—that his evidence was the most important and the most damaging of all.’

‘The question is,’ observed the Rector, in a low voice, ‘what Mark has to say about the matter.’

‘I have nothing to say,’ said Mark, vehemently. ‘Nothing, that is, but what is to Kit’s credit. How dare they summons me to speak against dear Kit? I could speak *for* him, and never be weary of it; but *against* him? What can I have to say?’

The women sobbed, ‘What, indeed?’ but the two men sat silent.

‘It is a matter for your own decision, Mark,’ said the Doctor, presently; ‘but if you know nothing to Kit’s disadvantage in this matter, it is clear your evidence cannot hurt

him ; whereas to shrink from your duty would expose you to very grave reflections.'

'Expose me!' interrupted the young man, scornfully. 'How can you talk of *me* with Kit standing yonder in the felon's dock?' And with a trembling hand he pointed before him into vacancy as though he beheld him there.

'Then I will say what I have already said,' continued the Doctor, earnestly ; 'that your absence will prejudice the public mind against him.'

'Against him, against him,' echoed Mark, resuming his feverish walk ; 'to appear in the witness-box *against* him—think of that!'

It might well be imagined that in Mark's condition of mind all logical persuasion would have been without effect, but this was not so. When the torrent of his feelings had subsided a little, the arguments which had been thrown

into it, as it were, and been apparently carried away, showed their grim heads above the stream. Upon the whole, he judged the last advice—namely, to obey the subpœna—to be the better of the two; though perhaps if he had known how much the consideration of his own (Mark's) reputation had weighed with the Doctor in giving it, he would have been of the contrary opinion. It weighed also with Mr. Penryn, we may be sure; but his own more sympathetic temperament appreciated more fully what Mark would suffer in the public ordeal. Nor had this escaped the Doctor, to whose professional eye, indeed, Mark's state of mind was very far from satisfactory. He would not have been so urgent, perhaps, for his young friend's sticking to his guns, but that he saw daylight ahead—and out of darkness. If Mark should break down either physically or men-

tally—a contingency he confidently expected—he had a panacea in store for all their troubles. A subpoena is a very serious thing; but it is overridden by a medical certificate.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MARK'S DIFFICULTY

DR. MEADE had a large heart, and it had a corner in it for Christopher Garston and his perilous case, notwithstanding that, as we know, he had no high opinion of his morals; but charity began at home with him, as with most of us, and in the troubles that ensued his main care was for Mark Medway, lest, under pressure of them, his brain should give way and he should follow in his father's steps.

It is with Mark, and not with Kit, that we also ourselves are mainly concerned.

Prison life has its attractions—for the out-

sider—no doubt ; but one day of it is as a thousand. No slight part of the offender's doom is the iron monotony of his existence ; it is as mechanical as that of the caged bullfinch who draws water at the word of command, but, alas ! does not sing. We talk of equality of punishment, but it is probable that during this terrible time no murderer in Newgate gaol suffered worse than Christopher Garston. Every day he saw his sister in the glass room ; no other friendly face could he be induced to see. The stone walls that surrounded him were not stiffer, nor stronger, than the pride within him. It might be, he grimly said, that in a week's time he would be cut off from all human society ; and he prepared to go into training for that contingency. As to his guilt or innocence, he never alluded to the subject to Trenna at all ; that was a matter, he said, for his solici-

tor. This silence, of course, was dreadfully significant, but the solicitor talked to her with a certain frankness (which, however, always stopped short of candour), and had hopes. The circumstances were 'most unfortunate,' he said, in some respects, but, after all, the possession of the diamond had never been brought home to his client.

At her own request, she also saw her brother's leading counsel. In speech, he was more reticent than the gentleman representing 'the lower branch of the profession,' but so tender and pitiful in his manner that she gathered from him at once, if not the worst, at least that Kit was standing in extreme peril.

At Trenna's lodgings, in Ludgate Hill, there was from the date of her arrival to the day of the trial but one other visitor, and he only admitted after repeated solicitations—namely, Dr. Meade.

She received him with a formality that almost amounted to antagonism ; but he understood what underlay it.

‘I am come here, neither to pity nor condole with you, Trenna,’ he said, ‘but simply to ask one question : What can I do for you?’

Her lips moved once or twice before she could reply, then answered, ‘Nothing, nothing,’ in a tone of one past hope as well as help.

‘I never saw Trenna look so beautiful as on that occasion,’ the Doctor used to say, ‘but it was the beauty of a face in sculpture. One might fancy it keeping watch over a tomb.’ She said, indeed, but little, but her face and manner had more significance than any words. He spoke to her of the family at the Knoll, and how greatly they desired to be with her.

‘Not now, not now,’ she replied. ‘Hereafter—perhaps.’

Wherefrom he gathered, and gathered rightly, that if Kit should be acquitted, things might be with her once more as of old, but, if otherwise, she was steadily determined to cast in her lot with him as far as might be, and to be as dead to what had once been life as he must needs be.

Then he told her, as he felt bound to do, that Mark had been subpœnaed for the prosecution.

Her face turned deadly pale; she drew a long breath that seemed to give her intense pain, and murmured something he could not catch.

‘There is, I need not say, no help for it, Trenna, but Mark is in despair; he has nothing, of course, to say against Kit; he has no conception why he has been summoned; but the idea of it—the horror of even *seeming* to take part against him——’

‘I understand,’ she said, and closed her eyes and bowed her head. It was evidently the worst of news to her.

‘Does this come upon you with surprise, dear Trena?’ he inquired gently.

‘Not on *me*.’ Mr. Burton, her brother’s solicitor, had, it seemed, led her to expect so much. ‘But Kit, poor Kit! Oh, can nothing be done, Doctor?’

He knew what she meant as though she had expressed it in every detail.

‘Mr. Penryn and the rest of us have looked at it from all points of view,’ he answered gravely. ‘We wish to act for the best, you may be sure.’

‘Kit will not think so,’ was her unexpected rejoinder. ‘Oh, Doctor, this is what he feared.’

‘So I concluded, my poor girl,’ replied the

other gently. 'But, on the other hand, is it not the lesser of two evils—I mean that Mark should come? Would not his absence be thought worse of than any evidence he must needs give?'

'That is Mr. Burton's view.'

'And surely he must know best, Trenna.'

'Kit does not think so. Oh, Doctor, how can I tell him?' She pushed the masses of black hair from her forehead and rocked herself to and fro, murmuring, 'Bad news—bad news.'

Even to the Doctor, used as he was to scenes of sorrow and despair, it was a terrible interview.

Presently she put out both hands, as if to thrust him from her. 'Leave me, leave me,' she moaned.

'No, dear Trenna; not like that,' he

pleaded. 'Remember the old times. You have friends still who love you dearly, and will love you still, whatever happens. For the first time I told my poor lad to-day, who has been at the point of death, what—what had taken place. He is the shadow of his former self, and can hardly move or speak, yet he tried to rise, and whispered, "I must go to Trenna"; then, when I told him that was impossible, he bade me tell you, with his dear love, that he knew all.'

'Did he say that?' she cried, clasping her trembling hands. 'Did he say that?'

'He did indeed.'

The expression of her face amazed him: it was that of passionate thankfulness, and was to him altogether inexplicable.

'Tell him, tell him,' she went on, 'that I

wish him all that he deserves. No more he needs to have.'

'You must tell him that yourself,' said the Doctor, smiling; 'he wants a tonic.'

She shook her head. 'I shall never see him more,' she said; 'never, never.' And with a movement of her hand towards the door, so earnest and imploring that he could not but obey it, she burst into a passion of tears.

Leaving his address with the landlady, a solid, demure Scotchwoman, in case of need, the Doctor returned to his son. Frank listened to his account of his late interview with rapt attention.

'Father,' he said, 'I am sorry to have brought you so far for my sake; but I cannot return to Mogadion till this is over.'

'Do you mean the trial, Frank?'

'Yes.'

The Doctor paced the room, his brow knitted, not with disappointment, but in thought. The reflection that his son would suffer from anxiety if removed from town more than he would benefit from change, no doubt crossed his mind, but he was a man of too large sympathies to think only of his own flesh and blood.

‘You are right,’ he said; ‘when all is over Trena may feel differently towards her old friends. We must give the poor girl another chance.’

Then he wrote to Mrs. Medway, telling her what had passed, and the determination he had arrived at to stay with his son. ‘At the same time,’ he added, ‘should your dear Mark give you cause for anxiety, a telegram from you will bring me to the Knoll at once. My own impression is that things had better take their

course. But in case of any unlooked-for excitement manifesting itself, which would suggest mischief as regards his coming to town, I should have no hesitation, from what I know of him, in placing on it my professional veto.'

This was so broad a hint that in case of need Mrs. Medway could hardly fail to take it; yet she made no sign. Receiving no answer to his letter, and feeling some disquiet, the Doctor wrote again. Then Mrs. Medway replied.

'Mark has shown no "excitement," nor given us any such cause for anxiety as to induce me to take the course you so thoughtfully suggested. I did not write to you because I was in doubt what to say. Of course it would have been a comfort to us if you had been here, but not being so, I cannot say there was

need to send for you. He has been very silent, and more solitary in his habits than usual. Of course the thing is on his mind; I fear, indeed, it is never absent from it; but he never speaks of it, and has forbidden us to do so. He passes hours alone in his study, with poor Trenna's bird, and when he joins us brings it into the room with him. He likes to hear it chatter about "Tren" and Kit.

'To-day, however, it distressed him sadly. We were all at breakfast together, Maud and I making conversation about something or another, from which, as you may guess, our hearts were far away, when the bird began to croak of its old master: "Fie, fie, Kit," it said; "Tut, tut, tut, tut, tut; Kit's a pretty fellow! Poor Tren! Poor Tren!"

'Really it was as though a human being had been complaining of him. You should

have seen poor Mark's face, or, rather, I am glad you did *not* see it. I thought he would have killed the bird. At last Maud snatched up a shawl, and threw it over the cage, which, as usual, reduced its tenant to silence. Since then Mark has not asked for the bird, and we have put it out of his sight and hearing.

‘We are all coming up to town on Saturday, to the Roden Hotel. How many in party we shall be, on our return, Heaven knows; Mark counts confidently on Kit and Trenna; and as to the latter, even in case of the worst, no doubt it will be so. For where else is she to go? My heart bleeds for her almost as much as for poor Kit. How infinitely heavier is her cross to bear than mine. And yet I tremble for my own poor boy. What an ordeal is before him! That he would

give his life to save his friend I am well convinced ; but *can* he save him ? Mr. Penryn and all the neighbours hereabouts seem to think that things will go hard with him. Remember, Doctor, he had no mother, and a father such as he would have been better without. God help us all ! When you come to see us at the hotel do not hint a word about the medical certificate ; Mark's mind is set upon going into Court.'

This letter disturbed the Doctor even worse than the writer's silence had done—which, indeed, its last sentence explained. Mrs. Medway had evidently communicated his proposition to her son, and had been forbidden to accept it.

On the Saturday the party from the Knoll arrived in town, and on the next day the Doctor dined with them. Mark ate nothing ;

spoke very little, and that with evident effort ; and looked deadly pale. He had had no communication of any sort from the solicitors for the prosecution, and seemed to expect none : ‘ I have nothing to say,’ he said, ‘ they know I have nothing to say. It was a subpoena at random.’

As he seemed to have persuaded himself of this the Doctor made no attempt to argue the question, though his own opinion was quite different. There was some talk about his son, to whom the whole party had paid a visit that morning at the Doctor’s lodgings, to which he had been removed ; but with Mark and his mother the coming event of the morrow threw its shadow on everything and monopolised their thoughts, while Maud’s heart was too full for speech. To see Frank again in life, though with so little of it, had been the cause of

intense thankfulness to her; but in view of what was hanging over Kit and Trenna she would have felt it wicked to rejoice. She had written to the latter a most moving letter, entreating her to receive her; but on calling at her lodgings with her mother they had been denied. Mark, it was understood, though he did not speak of it, had made a similar appeal to Kit, in vain.

Late on Sunday night, however, long after the Doctor had taken his leave, a note was left for Mark which threw him into the utmost agitation. Its contents were but a couple of lines written in a well-known hand.

‘Remember! I once saved *you* from a living tomb; burn this at once.’

The deduction was obvious enough. By the memory of what he had done for him in boyhood, Kit adjured him to do him the like

service now. But how was he to effect it? In the affairs of the world Mark was as a child, and of legal matters he knew nothing. Why had not Kit explained to him what he wished him to do? Why had he declined to speak with him, and at this last moment sent him a riddle? He lay awake all night thinking of its solution, yet it was a riddle that almost any one could have guessed but Mark himself. The difficulty in his case was an initial one; and lay in the form in which he himself put the question, ‘How am I to save this innocent man?’

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN THE WITNESS BOX.

A PECULIARITY of the law of England, which no doubt adds to its terrors to persons of imagination, is the quietness with which it goes about its work. Until the judge in his wig and gown is actually beheld upon the bench there is nothing ostentatious about it. Its eye may be upon the individual, for example, whose evidence is necessary to its operations, but it is as invisible as that of Providence itself. To all appearance—and indeed in fact—on that long-looked-for morning which was to decide the fate of his friend, Mark Medway was a free man ; it lay

with himself to go to 'the Justice Hall at the Old Bailey' to bear witness in the case, or not to go. The Prosecution, beyond serving him with the subpœna, had not communicated with him. The Defence had not communicated with him. He had received no word of menace from the one, or advice from the other. It is possible that both sides had their own reasons for leaving him so entirely to himself, but the effect upon his mind was deleterious; it was not unhinged, but it shifted this way and that, like a ship without a rudder, with every eddy of thought. He was even in doubt at this last moment as to whether he should appear in Court or not. The idea of the fine did not weigh one feather with him; nor would it have done so had it been ten times the amount. But might not Kit's appeal, so vague and yet so instant, point to absence as the course he

wished him to adopt? Yet if that had been so why had he not written to that effect outright? There might have been danger in so saying, of course; but the fact that he had written 'Burn this at once' upon the slip of paper showed that danger had been already incurred. Upon the whole Mark resolved to attend.

In utter ignorance of the usual course of proceeding, he had arranged to go with Dr. Meade (who had procured an order of admission for two to the body of the Court), as though he had been a mere spectator. Neither Mrs. Medway nor Maud had the courage to put in an appearance, but held themselves in readiness to drive to Ludgate Hill immediately on the conclusion of the trial. They understood, of course, that Trenna's veto only held good while matters were *in dubio*. If things went well she would have their heartfelt con-

gratulations; they would welcome Kit as one snatched from the burning but without a doubt of the verdict that should proclaim his innocence; if things went ill—a contingency that made them sick to think of—there were loving hearts and helpful hands and a home for her at the Knoll through the dark years to come, or, if need be, for life.

A crowded Court, the shuffling of feet, the opening of doors, a buzz of many tongues, the entrance of the Judge—and silence. All these things fell on Mark's ear and eye unheeded; he saw and heard them, but they were like the actions of a dream. The charge to the Grand Jury was to him the merest tissue of words, for Christopher Garston's name had no place in it; there were persons more important to be spoken of—murderers. Kit was alluded to, though Mark knew it not,

under 'certain cases of felony of the usual kind,' which would 'also demand their attention.' Mark's gaze was riveted on the dock, in which every moment he expected—with unspeakable horror—to see his friend appear. Presently, among the cases in which the Grand Jury were announced to have found 'true bills' was that of Christopher Garston. Mark started and trembled as the name was pronounced. 'That is nothing,' whispered the Doctor, comfortingly: 'no one could have expected otherwise. It is the other Jury—yonder—with whom his fate lies.'

Mark cast one glance in the direction indicated; the men in the box, except that there were twelve of them, were no more to him than so many nine-pins; the mere mechanism of Fate had no attraction for him; his mind was keeping room for a single image;

his eyes, with the constancy of the needle to the pole, reverted once more to the dock.

A pickpocket, suave and genteel (until conviction, when he broke out); a burglar, scowling and truculent; a woman, shrill and confident, accused of the manufacture of base coin; and then Kit himself. The contrast between his appearance and that of his predecessors drew every eye on him; handsome as ever, though a trifle pale, with the same bright look on his face as Mark had seen there a thousand times. Quiet, but alert, he looked, if not an innocent man, very unlike one's ideas of a guilty one. His gaze flashed round the Court like a sunbeam, till it rested on Mark, who mechanically stretched out his hands.

‘Be calm—don’t speak,’ whispered the Doctor, warningly. ‘It may do him harm.’

The next moment was heard the strident

official voice calling upon the prisoner to plead 'Guilty' or 'Not Guilty,' in the name of our Sovereign Lady the Queen. The words had the same strange effect on Mark as the jargon of the subpoena had had. They sounded weird to him, as well as menacing, like the rattling of unseen chains. But on Kit himself they had no such impression; they even seemed to arouse in him the same feeling of ridicule which they would, without doubt, have evoked under ordinary circumstances. But his face became grave and earnest enough ere they had died away, and in a quiet, musical voice, which was, nevertheless, heard all over the Court, he entered his plea of 'Not Guilty.'

To Mark he had given but one look, and it was not repeated; nor did it need to be. Never was glance of mortal more significant of confidence and affection—nay, it had a certain

tender assurance in it, as though, aware of the anguish of his soul, it would have bidden him be of good comfort. The prisoner's face was now turned on the counsel for the prosecution, to whose address he seemed to listen with rapt attention, interrupted occasionally by a fleeting smile. Mark heard it likewise, of course, but the tumult of his feelings prevented him from pursuing it in proper sequence, far more from comprehending the gist of it. His eyes were fixed on Kit; his mind wandered to Trenarvon Castle and the river; then back to his school time, when Kit and he were boys together—Kit, his own familiar friend, between whom and the man the counsel was painting so blackly there was the same sort of connection that things have in a nightmare, no more.

Presently the witnesses began to be called. First came comparatively unimportant ones,

and then Mr. Flesker, the jeweller, an earnest, excitable gentleman, who had certainly lost something very valuable, whoever had taken it. Mark saw the man reflected, as it were, in Kit's face, and felt that he was speaking the truth.' His facts were correct enough; where he failed was in his deduction. The idea of Kit, Mark's Kit, the man whom he had known from childhood, who had preserved his life and his honour, the sunshine of the Knoll, the—— Suddenly his dream was broken in upon by a shouting of his own name. Every tongue in the Court (so it seemed) was calling to him, the Doctor's kind, earnest voice among them at his elbow.

'My dear lad, they are calling you. You must go up into the witness-box.'

'Great Heavens! What shall I say?'

Not that Mark had any intention, nor

would even have been persuaded, to say anything save the truth, but that he felt bewildered. He went up into the box with no less shame and pain than if it had been the pillory, only in his case the spectators were of no account. There was but one man in all that concourse on whom his thoughts were fixed, and on him he gazed with piteous deprecation.

‘Be so kind as to give me your attention, Mr. Medway,’ said the counsel in dulcet tones. Mark was his own witness, to be treated tenderly, and encouraged. When this learned gentleman was not engaged in brow-beating he devoted his attention to lubrication, and in both accomplishments was highly distinguished.

‘You know the prisoner at the bar, I believe?’

‘Yes, indeed.’

‘For long?’

‘For years—indeed, for almost his life.’

‘You are old friends, in short?’

‘Oh yes. We have never been otherwise.’

‘Just so; I do not for a moment impute any interested motive; but the prisoner is under considerable obligations to you—social obligations—is he not?’

‘None that I know of; none, I hope, that he feels.’

‘Well, well; so be it’ (smiling); ‘at all events, the obligation was not the other way?’

‘You are mistaken; I am under the greatest obligations to him—obligations I can never forget.’

‘Indeed! Would you mind mentioning one of them?’

‘He saved my life.’

Here Mark looked toward the dock, and Kit's eye met his own. Their places seemed to have become transposed—it was the prisoner who gave hope and comfort to the witness; nay, his smile, tender as a woman's, seemed to apologise for his having been the unwilling cause of the other's painful position.

‘It will soon be over, my dear Mark,’ it seemed to say, ‘but in the meantime how I grieve for your distress of mind.’

‘And, besides saving your life,’ continued the counsel, blandly, ‘what other obligations did the prisoner confer upon you?’

Mark turned crimson. ‘Many others,’ he answered.

‘Just so.’ Under that ‘Just so’ lay an armoury of insults, had it been his cue to use them; but for his present purpose things were going like oil. ‘Just so; there were other

obligations which it is unnecessary to particularise. None of them had the least connection with the matter on hand ? ’

Mark shook his head.

‘ You were fast friends, then, and had no secrets from one another ? ’

‘ I have no secrets from Christopher Garston—none,’ replied Mark, gravely, with a look at his friend that seemed to say, ‘ Would you could see my heart.’

‘ I must once more request—nay, insist—Mr. Medway, upon your giving your undivided attention to me,’ observed the counsel for the prosecution. Up to this time he had been willing enough that Mark’s attachment for the prisoner should be made manifest to the jury : but it now became of great importance that no communication—even so much as could be conveyed by a glance of the eye—should

pass between the dock and the witness box.

‘Being so confidential with one another, the prisoner no doubt informed you of his relations with the Cook’s Creek Company?’

‘He spoke of them generally—not in detail.’

‘Well, come. What did he say of them?’

‘On the whole, he expressed himself hopefully about the prospects of the mine.’

‘And as to his own prospects?’

‘They, of course, depended on the success of the mine.’

‘No doubt; but what did he say of his own position as the salaried manager? He boasted, I believe, of having the confidence of the directors? Was it not so?’

‘He did not boast of it. He stated what was the fact—that his exertions on their behalf had been appreciated.’

‘He also, I understand, spoke of a certain acknowledgment which they had made him?’

‘He did.’

‘Now, Mr. Medway, be so good as to turn towards the jury while I ask you this question : Of what did that acknowledgment consist?’

‘It was a diamond ring.’

‘Are you quite certain it was not a scarf pin?’

‘I am positively certain.’

There was a pause.

‘Would you be able to recognise the diamond ring?’

‘I think so.’

‘And the diamond?’

‘If I recognise the ring it would be by the diamond.’

‘Can you describe it?’

‘Not scientifically ; but it was what I believe is called a rose, a hemisphere covered with small facets.’

‘Is this the diamond’ (one was here produced and handed to the witness) ‘which was shown to you by the prisoner as having been presented to him by the board of directors?’

It was a crucial moment, and almost every one in Court was aware of it, except Mark Medway himself. He had the utmost confidence in his friend’s innocence, and could not understand how speaking the truth could harm him ; it never entered into his mind that Kit could have told him a lie ; far less that out of his natural vanity and boastfulness he had invented the whole story of the directors’ gratitude to him, and their acknowledgment of his services ; indeed, it was not till long, very

long afterwards, that certain circumstances came to his recollection which suggested this ; in particular, how reticent, after that first mention of it, Kit had become about the ring, and how he had disliked its being made a topic of conversation. Moreover, the gem being out of its setting did not connect itself to Mark's mind with a scarf pin at all : it was only associated with a ring. Again, thanks to the emotions that contended within him, and blunted his sense of what was going on around him, he had not followed, as the more dispassionate jury had done, the course of the case, as stated by the prosecution. It was as strong as a cable, save in one place, where it was packthread. The actual possession of the stolen property had never been brought home to the prisoner ; and this was the very point to which the counsel for the prosecution was now

leading the unconscious Mark. There were two ways, it was afterwards said, by which it was possible, if he had been alive to the situation, that Mark Medway might have saved his friend. One by perjury, and the other by evasion. He might have sworn point blank that the diamond was not the diamond that Christopher Garston had shown him at the Crown in Mogadion; or he might have declared himself, as a person unacquainted with such matters, quite unable to identify the stone. It was to this latter course that Kit's written appeal without doubt had pointed; for as to the former he must have known that he could never have induced Mark to do even for him what he would certainly not have hesitated to do for Mark had their places been reversed; but probably he did think that Mark would have stretched a point, and confessed his in-

ability to offer any opinion upon the matter: What Mark would have replied had he understood the importance of the question and Kit's danger, it is difficult to say. What Mark did reply on having the jewel placed in his hands was this: 'To the best of my knowledge and belief this is the diamond that was shown me at the inn in Mogadion.'

'And that diamond, gentlemen of the jury,' observed the counsel for the prosecution in clear, sonorous, and slightly triumphant tones, 'is, as I shall prove to you, the very diamond stolen from Mr. Flesker's shop.'

Mark glanced with horror and affright at the dock. Kit did not return his look, but, with his hands clenching the rail beneath, was gazing straight before him, with a face that might have been marble, save for the eyes, which were the homes of shattered hopes and

mute despair. If his pale lips had cried, 'No more of this; I am guilty!' he could not have more convinced those who beheld him of his guilt and of his doom.

At that moment, however, public attention was diverted from him by 'an incident'—there were outcries for 'water' and 'a doctor.' Mark Medway had fallen down in the witness box, and was carried out in a dead faint.

CHAPTER L.

DARK DAYS.

DAYS and even weeks elapsed before Mark Medway recovered consciousness after that mental shock. He lay at his London hotel, at first in a high fever, during which he raved perpetually of Kit, and afterwards in a state of utter prostration. The first word he spoke on coming to himself was the name of his unhappy friend.

‘ Kit—what happened—the verdict? ’

They were obliged to tell him, for evasion only aggravated his anxiety. The word ‘ Guilty ’ excited him alarmingly.

‘*Not* guilty,’ he exclaimed, in an agitated whisper. ‘No, no ; Kit was never guilty.’

He had been convicted, however, and sentenced to ten years’ penal servitude.

‘Ten years,’ muttered Mark, with the dew on his brow. ‘A living tomb ; and it was I who sent him there.’

It was in vain to reason with him ; indeed, to point out the plain fact that no telling of the truth could have consigned an innocent man to prison would have been dangerous to the patient’s very life. It was better to leave him to self-reproach than to excite his indignation.

His next inquiry was for Trenna ; and here, again, they had bad news for him. Notwithstanding her son’s illness, Mrs. Medway had left his bedside and driven to Ludgate Hill within a few minutes of the issue of the trial

being known, but Trenna had already left her lodgings, and was gone no one knew whither. They would have obtained the information from Kit's own lips, but the convict denied himself to all. He was resolved to meet no familiar face. An application to his solicitor, indeed, gave them the assurance that Trenna was in health, and in no want of funds; but it was plain that she had taken the same resolve as her brother, and Mrs. Medway and Maud could do no more than address the most loving of letters, with a renewed offer of every material aid.

The two persons who had made so large a portion of their home life had cut themselves off from it—one of necessity, the other by her own act—and the Knoll was to know them no more.

To Mrs. Medway herself this was a serious

blow, and to Maud a most distressing one ; but to Mark it was well-nigh destruction. His affections, diffused among very few persons, had been mainly concentrated upon Kit, and they were not only crushed but, as it were, mutilated. To have lost his friend by death would have been a wound which time would have healed. What had happened to him was infinitely worse than death, and it had occurred—nothing could get this out of his mind—through Mark's own act. 'Remember, I have saved you from a living tomb,' were words that never ceased to ring in his ears ; yet, when the moment arrived to remember them, he had not done so. The question, 'How could he have acted otherwise?' was put to him again and again. Of course he had no answer to it ; but he was beyond the reach of logic. To his morbid mind, it was his

own voice which had pronounced Kit's sentence.

After some time, the whole party, including the Doctor and his son, returned home. Frank had pleaded with his father to remain in town with the Medways; and, indeed, Maud's society seemed to have as beneficial an effect upon his health as his native air could have had. The Doctor's professional eye soon perceived this, and it enabled him to guess the cause, of which he had hitherto had no suspicion. The talk of the young people, indeed, was not of love; the circumstances—Mark so weak and shattered, and his nearest friend in gaol—were too distressing for that. But Frank lived in Love's atmosphere, and drew life and vigour from every breath of it. His Herculean strength was gone, never to return, but he was convalescent, and would in time, it was confid-

ently predicted, be able to pursue his profession at Mogadion, though not among the murk and smoke of London. His dream of ambition was over ; but as bright a reality—or so he flattered himself—remained for him.

There are few things more satisfactory to the human mind than the sense of recovery from physical illness, and since in addition it was that period of the year when the whole earth seems growing convalescent in sympathy with us, and when a young man's fancy is said most naturally 'to turn to thoughts of love,' it is no wonder that Frank Medway was in a frame of mind to be envied. He deeply regretted, and was still more deeply shocked at, what had happened to Kit ; but there was a reason which forbade him to pity him as others did, far less to entertain, as was the case with Mark, an unaltered opinion

of his merits. It was now abundantly clear to him that the crime for which Christopher Garston was paying so terrible a penalty was not his first; and what Frank could not forgive him was that of that first crime he had permitted his sister to bear the burden. That Trenna should have stolen those bank-notes from her father had always been an inexplicable mystery to Frank; but he had believed her own statement that she had done so. He was now certain, and had told her so, as we know, by his father's mouth, that she was innocent of that offence, and he was filled with anger against the man who had caused him to impute it to her.

It was Frank alone who thoroughly understood why Trenna had refused all offers of assistance from her old friends, and declined to come near them. Her devotion to her

brother was as great as ever; indeed, since it had existed when she was conscious of his former criminality, there was no reason why it should now have suffered change, and he could easily believe that to dwell among those who had loved him, and who, with one exception, must needs be convinced of his guilt, was an impossibility for her. Thus it happened that while Frank's kind heart bled for Trenna, it did not so keenly concern itself for Kit. He was a man too who, though he had great command over himself, was ill-fitted to simulate feelings which he did not entertain; and not to praise, far more not to pity, Kit, was in Mark's eyes an offence of the gravest kind. The friendship of the two young men was not indeed sundered on account of this, for it takes two to make a quarrel, but it became one-sided, and more and more

difficult to sustain—it flew, as it were, on one wing. Frank, who had little to do for the present but to get well, was now a constant visitor at the Knoll, and instead of passing his time where it would naturally have been most pleasant to pass it, in Maud's company, he devoted himself to the task of raising her brother from his settled melancholy ; but with what small success under such circumstances it may be guessed. At last the thin ice broke under them both.

In the months of spring the charming little place looked at its best, and one day, as the two young men were walking together in the garden, Frank made some remark upon its excessive beauty.

‘ You enjoy it, do you ? ’ was Mark's abrupt, almost savage reply ; ‘ I hate it. ’ Then sud-

denly he began to repeat in a pathetic voice the exquisite lines—

I wake, I rise, from end to end
Of all the landscape underneath
I find no place that does not breathe
Some gracious memory of my friend.

‘There are the trees and the flowers as of old, but they have no longer any charms for me ; there is the river and the wilderness, but their glory is gone. “O for the touch of a vanished hand !” I keep saying to myself, “and the sound of a voice that is still.”’

‘You miss him, of course, dear Mark ; but is it reasonable to permit his loss to embitter your whole life ?’

‘His loss ?’ was the grave reply. ‘Do you think, then, I am indulging a mere selfish melancholy ? Would that I *had* lost him. Do you know what he is doing now while we are walking in the sunshine, through the grass

and under the trees? He is in the prison yard taking his exercise between two felons, always at the same distance from him, and watched by warders. He is in prison garb; his home is a cell, bare of all comfort; he is put to menial tasks. He will never smile again. He speaks to me, sometimes, but not in the voice I know.'

'Speaks to you, my dear fellow? How can Kit speak to you?'

'He does,' answered Mark, in a hoarse whisper. 'His spirit speaks, and always to reproach me.'

'Then it is a lying spirit!' observed Frank, boldly. He was indignant at the hold which this unworthy object of Mark's friendship had obtained over his mind, and apprehensive of the consequences of it. 'What have you to reproach yourself with? You only did your duty.'

‘My duty!’ echoed the other, bitterly. ‘You might say as much of the jury that condemned him.’

Then Frank made a mistake. His father had particularly enjoined upon him that the topic of Christopher Garston was to be avoided in Mark’s presence, and above all that no argument should be entered into with him upon the subject of the trial; and now there ensued an argument. Frank defended the jury and their verdict. Mark was furious.

‘You will say next,’ he exclaimed, ‘that Kit was guilty.’

To this Frank made no reply. His silence was fatal, and dissolved the friendship of a lifetime.

The young man still continued his visits to the family, but from henceforth, so far as

Mark was concerned, they were paid on sufferance.

By this time Frank and Maud were pledged to one another, and, of course, with Mrs. Medway's consent; but it was very awkward, under such circumstances, to communicate the fact to Mark. As it was to be a twelvemonth's engagement, however, there was no need for precipitation. This was fortunate, for on one occasion, when Mark and his mother chanced to be talking of Maud, he gave her to understand that, in his opinion, his sister ought to consider herself as a sort of bride of Heaven, Kit himself being the representative of that celestial region. 'After what has happened,' he said, 'it is impossible, I admit, that she can ever become Kit's wife, but she will hardly forget that but for this calamity she would have been so.'

‘Indeed, indeed, you are mistaken, Mark,’ urged Mrs. Medway. ‘You surely remember that she rejected him?’

Mark allowed that there had been a postponement of some kind, but insisted on his own view, that ‘the remorseless iron hour’ which had ‘made cypress of her orange flower’ was that in which Kit’s unjust sentence had been pronounced. ‘I cannot understand,’ he said, ‘a girl of delicate feeling even thinking, under such circumstances, of marrying another man.’

‘Mark must be mad,’ thought poor Mrs. Medway; but, as Dr. Meade pointed out to her, it was not madness to be dominated by one idea. ‘Mark will be right enough,’ he said, ‘if only the actual state of the case, and the true character of Mr. Christopher Garston, can be brought home to him.’

The Doctor was very bitter against Kit, for

he greatly desired his son's union with Maud, to which these morbid feelings of her brother were the only hindrance.

‘He never will be persuaded of Christopher Garston’s guilt,’ sobbed Mrs. Medway, ‘nor be brought to listen to reason;’ she might have added, ‘nor to unreason either,’ for the poor parrot had to be kept in the attic lest he should express sentiments adverse to his former master.

‘Never is a long day,’ answered the Doctor, drily; but in the meantime it was evidently quite useless to attempt to obtain Mark’s consent to the young people’s marriage.

He kept himself informed of every detail regarding his imprisoned friend; and presently news came that Kit had broken down in health, and had been removed in the early summer from Millbank to Dartmoor, under

medical direction, nine months before the usual time.

This made Mark more restless than ever—not only from anxiety on account of Kit, but from the consciousness of his own comparative nearness to his unfortunate friend. He would gaze in the direction of the prison—but forty miles or so away—and murmur to himself, ‘Buried alive! Buried alive!’ till his poor mother thought him crazed. Instead of devoting himself to his books, as of old, he took long solitary walks, which were the source of great distress of mind to her until he returned from them, weary and haggard enough, but in safety.

It was characteristic of Frank Meade that, though he without doubt had it in his power to shatter Mark’s belief in his friend by a revelation of the facts of the bank-note robbery,

he kept them to himself, because he had passed his word to Trena so to do.

It was understood that she had migrated from London to some village on Dartmoor, in the neighbourhood of the prison—a piece of information obtained from the gaol chaplain, who happened to be a college friend of Mr. Penryn's. At that gentleman's request, he wrote of Kit with great particularity. He described his conduct as excellent; he had obtained as many good 'marks' as possible during his term of servitude, and would undoubtedly leave the prison considerably before the expiration of his sentence—if he should live to do so. But he was suffering from a kind of atrophy. His food, such as it was, did not nourish him, and he had been placed in the infirmary. The chaplain had expressed to him Mark's intense desire for an interview,

which could have been accomplished had the prisoner wished for it, but Kit, as before, had steadily refused to see him.

‘It is no wonder,’ sighed the unhappy Mark ; ‘it is I who have imprisoned him, and, when he dies, his death will be at my door.’

But the chaplain’s view was that it was no animosity against his old friend which actuated Kit, but a certain stubborn pride. This was also the opinion entertained by Frank and Maud.

Poor Kit, in his halcyon days, had nicknamed Mark the Dreamer, Frank the Worker, and himself (as one who meant to take life lightly and in the humorous vein) the Player. He had even sketched out their various parts in the Drama of the Future ; but the reality, alas ! especially in his own case, had fallen sadly short of his ideal. His natural vanity

(which had been as much the cause of his ruin as his graver faults) had led him to anticipate great things for himself, to be achieved in an easy way. And to what an impotent and shameful conclusion had it all come! When we consider, too, that he probably believed (whatever Trenna might do) that the family at the Knoll had been by this time put in possession of the story of his abstraction of his father's notes, including his laying the blame (however temporarily) upon Abel Deeds, it is not surprising that Kit preferred to wear his chain unseen, and let the iron eat into his soul without his old friends' condolences or forgiveness. That he suspected Frank of having exposed him was pretty certain from what the chaplain wrote of Kit's feelings towards the young doctor; though, on the other hand, it might have arisen from

jealousy, since he had spoken of Frank's engagement with Maud—of which he had by some means obtained information—with exceeding bitterness.

This last part of the chaplain's communication was carefully withheld from Mark ; nor, indeed, could the whole letter have been read to him in any case, since the guilt of the prisoner was throughout it taken for granted.

Thus at the Knoll, where peace and unanimity were wont to reign, matters were now far from being in a satisfactory state ; and presently an incident took place so amazing and unlooked for as baffled calculation, and which caused even those who had taken the most sanguine view of affairs to despond, if not to despair.

CHAPTER LI.

GHOST OR NO GHOST?

ON a certain September evening Mark Medway was returning home later than his wont from one of his solitary walks. He had been visiting a favourite haunt, the ruins of Trenarvon Castle, where we first met him with his two friends; it was but a few years ago, but change has been busy with him and them.

Frank Meade indeed, save as respects his health, is little altered, nor is his present position in life different from what it might reasonably be expected to be; he assists his father in his profession, and has a practice on

his own account that is increasing ; while as to his relations with Mark they would be as friendly as ever, and with a nearer bond, if Mark himself would but permit it.

But Mark is another man. His clear-cut attractive face has grown thin and haggard ; his quiet scholar-like look has changed to one of suspicion and unrest ; there is something in his eyes which makes Dr. Meade look grave when Mrs. Medway, to whom he still speaks with cheerfulness and hope, is not at hand. He and she alone know how Mark's father came by his end.

And Kit, poor Kit, whose light laugh used to ring through yonder copse, and his smile enhance the sunshine, where are his gibes and his merriment now ? It is of Kit, we may be sure, that Mark is thinking, as he paces sentry-like beneath the deserted rampart. Here it

was that he had told that curious incident of his boyhood, how in jest he had sold himself to the foul fiend, and here had reminded Frank how they two had agreed to meet together once again even though Death should have divided them.

The moon was rising, and silvering the waste of waters with its cold gleam, but not a ship was in sight. Mark remembered that he had been told in the town that day that a certain vessel bound for Rio, which had lain in the harbour for some days at the quay that fronted the Dovecote, was to sail with the tide that night; the tide was due, and what little wind there was was fair for the ship; but she still delayed. Mark was watching for her with that dreamy interest which sometimes arises respecting some extraneous object, when the mind is otherwise deeply preoccupied; or

perhaps it was through some instinct of association with Kit himself, who had been wont to take delight in such occurrences. Not only had all human affairs had their attraction for him, but everything that had life and motion. And now by a malignant and unjust destiny, reflected Mark, he was shut out from them all !

There are times, 'when our light is low,' wherein 'the riddle of the painful earth' grows suddenly importunate, and the spirit, like a caged bird, dashes itself in despair against the unseen but adamantine wall that surrounds us all ; and such a time had come on Mark. The question, 'Can such things be, and Heaven be just ?' was harassing his very soul. A deep sigh—which is all that ever comes of it—at last broke from his heart, and with a gesture with both hands (that pitiful sign of vain expostula-

tion with Fate which is made only by the mad and the miserable) he ran down through the copse and took the road towards home.

In a few hundred yards his way diverged from the main road, but before he quitted it, *this* happened. He beheld a figure rapidly advancing towards him on the turf by the wayside, and apparently bound for Mogadion. The form was familiar to him, but its face was bowed as if in thought. As it came on with noiseless tread, a sudden chill ran through his veins, and he suddenly cried out in an agony of distress and terror, 'Kit, Kit!'

The figure stopped, and looked at him intently. Though pale and thin, with hollow cheeks and hollow eyes that shone like fire, it was indeed Kit himself.

'Merciful Heaven!' cried Mark, clasping his hands, 'it is he!'

He would have embraced him, but the other motioned him back with a quick movement of the hand.

‘Are you so angry with me, Kit?’ exclaimed Mark, despairingly.

The other shook his head.

‘Have you escaped?’

‘Yes—from the grave,’ was the solemn rejoinder. ‘Remember my promise. I have kept my word.’

Mark’s blood was frozen with terror; yet his exceeding love to some extent conquered fear. ‘Is there anything—oh, Kit, even yet——’

‘You can do nothing for me.’

‘Too late, too late,’ moaned the unhappy Mark.

‘I am forbidden to speak of any such thing,’ continued the other; ‘take only this

word of warning. Beware of Frank Meade ; let him never be Maud's husband. Farewell.'

The speaker pointed to the horizon, and Mark's eyes mechanically followed the direction indicated. When he looked again the figure was gone. It had disappeared in an instant. The grass on which it had stood bordered the copse, and it was just possible that it had plunged into its depths ; but if so, it was with the quickness and silence of a wood snake. Nothing was to be seen save the misty road and the moonlit sea.

There is one argument (among many others) which has always convinced me that every individual, of whose character I have the means of judging, is lying when he tells me that he has seen a ghost, namely, the very slight impression that the supposed spectacle has made upon him. The gulf between the

living and the dead is so tremendous, and the desire, or at least the curiosity, to have it bridged is so extreme, that if that engineering feat had been ever accomplished, the spectator would never have enough to say about it ; or, if unwilling or forbidden to speak, would never cease to think of it. Such an experience, even though it happened to the most thoughtless and giddy-pated of men (who are our chief ghost-seers), would make an impression which no time could erase, and which would stand out in strong relief as compared with all their other life-experiences whatsoever. It has been urged, indeed, by those who have admitted this much, that if a man should be haunted, *i.e.* should see a ghost pretty often, custom would make a commonplace even of that ; and as a parallel instance the old belief in an eternity of physical torment has been

adduced. It was found possible, they say, by persons who believed that nineteen twentieths of the whole world, inciuding their own personal acquaintances, would perish in eternal fire, to get so used to the idea as to eat, sleep, and enjoy themselves in spite of it; but in such a case the word 'belief' is very elastic, and at the most means a heartless credulity. The passive acceptance of a dogma, however revolting to reason and humanity, is a very different thing from the conviction born of personal experience. A glance at the Gehenna which Calvin believed himself to believe in would have turned even his stomach for ever; and he who once saw a ghost—an actual denizen of the other world—would not, like those who believe, or pretend to believe, they have done so, enter it into his commonplace book among other 'remarkable events,' such as

snow in May, or the birth of a calf with two heads.

And thus it happened in this case. Mark Medway, being firmly convinced that his friend had left the Unseen World to speak with him, did not treat the matter as a visit from a person of distinction to be boasted of to his friends, or to be related, in moments of confidence, as an interesting circumstance. He went home in a state of awe as great as ever arose from human experience, and with a tendency, while obeying the injunctions of the dead man, to keep his interview with him a solemn secret. His air and manner on reaching the Knoll, however, were so strange and *distract*, and caused his mother such distress of mind, that an explanation was absolutely necessary. What he had to say only increased her agitation, though the alarm she exhibited

was by no means due to the cause to which he assigned it. Ghosts had no terrors for her ; but she trembled for her son's reason. She had been warned not to oppose his convictions ; but one argument, as powerful as it was simple, she did venture to advance.

‘ But, my dear Mark, Kit is not dead.’

Mark shook his head. ‘ I would,’ he sighed, ‘ that I could think so.’

‘ But if he is not, my dear Mark,’ she persisted, ‘ I suppose you will allow that you cannot have seen his ghost.’

It was really not much to ask in the way of admission, yet it aroused Mark's indignation. It seemed to him a sort of blasphemy to conceive of that mysterious presence, the recollection of which still shook his very soul, as being still in the flesh.

The first thing in the morning Mrs. Medway

sent for both her counsellors, and they brought the strangest news with them.

Christopher Garston was really dead. The Rector had received a letter that morning from the gaol chaplain announcing the prisoner's decease some days ago. 'I should have written before,' he said, 'but Miss Garston especially requested me not to do so till after the funeral. The attendance of any of his friends would, I am sure, have distressed her exceedingly. She was, of course, the sole mourner, and, indeed, under the circumstances, I cannot myself deplore the poor fellow's death. He had been ailing for a long time, growing weaker and thinner, but the end came somewhat unexpectedly ; he died in the infirmary in the night, and almost before the doctor could be summoned. At Miss Garston's request he was laid in the churchyard at Marston, at

which village she has been residing for these last three months. She left her lodgings immediately after the ceremony, but whither she has gone I have been unable to discover. It is possible, now that this sad page in her history is closed, that she may seek her old friends and yours. Heaven grant it may be so !’

‘This is indeed terrible news,’ gasped Mrs. Medway. ‘Do you think that that really happened about which I wrote to you?’

‘That Mark saw the ghost?’ exclaimed the Rector. ‘Well, upon my word, Mrs. Medway, you are a most disappointing woman. I have always held you up as a pattern of common-sense.’

‘But how do you explain it?’

‘Very easily. Mark heard this news, by some means, before we did. With his mind

greatly excited by it he visits an old haunt of his dead friend, and imagines he sees him. It is the simplest case of spectral illusion.'

'But, as I wrote to you, he tells me that the figure spoke to him—warned him against dear Frank's engagement with Maud.'

'I had rather not say what I think about that,' said the Doctor, with the colour in his cheek.

'On the contrary,' said the Rector, 'I think that part of the story is as easy of explanation as the rest of it. Your son has Kit in his mind—not to say on the brain—and thinks he saw him; he has also Kit's objection to Frank's marriage in his mind, and he thinks he hears him.'

'That's it,' assented the Doctor, cheerfully. He had already recovered from his little fit of spleen, and acknowledged to himself that the

idea which had momentarily occurred to him, that Mark had invented Kit's warning against Frank to suit his own views, was untenable. 'Of course,' he continued, 'this affair will make matters worse for the present; your son will be even more wrapped up in his dead friend than when he was alive, but, since he *is* dead, this glamour cannot last for ever. I believe in Dr. Time.'

Scarcely any one else among Mark's friends had the same belief in that eminent practitioner. Day after day went by without weakening in the least Mark's impression of that awful interview in the Castle Road, as the highway that ran beneath the old ruin was called, and what the apparition had said to him was as gospel in his eyes. He seemed more determined, so far as in him lay, to oppose his sister's union with Frank Meade

than ever. The Knoll was his mother's house, not his own, so Mark could not close its doors against him: but he showed plainly enough that the young man's visits were distasteful to him. Frank behaved with the utmost patience and gentleness; but it was out of the question that he could make himself acceptable to Mark since the way to the heart of his old friend was barred. Frank pitied him, and indeed pitied Kit, for his nature was not such a one as can pursue the dead with even righteous indignation; but he could not but resent the effect of his jealousy and ill-will towards him on Mark. He never dwelt on Kit's errors. The tomb was his asylum, but if Kit had been alive, and a free man, he would have told him what he thought of him in terms which would have been highly actionable. As to Trenna, Frank was as desirous as Maud herself to discover the

place of her concealment, and, if possible, to persuade her to return to her old friends. In addition to the natural compassion he felt for her lonely condition, it seemed to him that he owed her reparation for the wrong he had done her in thought of old. His inquiries about her were unceasing, and in the London newspapers he had inserted many dexterously worded advertisements, the joint composition of himself and Maud, which, while appealing to no eye but Trenna's, could not have failed, had she lighted on them, to attract her attention.

His solicitude on Trenna's account was no secret, however, in Mogadion, and at last he got news of her. Exactly a month after the announcement of Kit's death had been received at the Knoll, Abel Deeds, who was now in service with a local banker in the neighbour-

hood, by whom he was highly valued, called at the Dovecote one night, and made a private and confidential statement to 'Mr. Frank.'

He said that on that day month he had been sent on an errand which had detained him late, and that on returning home he had met, on the moonlit road, a young sailor coming towards Mogadion. The stranger, on catching sight of him, had crossed the road as if to avoid him, but Abel's pipe had gone out, and he had no matches, and being, like most men of his phlegmatic temperament, an inveterate smoker, he was not going to miss this excellent chance of remedying his calamity; for what sailor does not smoke tobacco and carry lights?

He therefore hailed the young man, who, probably not understanding what he wanted, answered, 'Good night, my man.' The words

were inapposite enough, but the tone in which they were uttered was so very peculiar that Abel stopped the lad.

‘I asked you,’ he said, ‘if you had a light about you. You answer me more like a girl than a boy. One would think,’ he added, referring to the season of local histrionics, ‘it was mumming time——’

‘Thank Heaven, it is Abel Deeds,’ interrupted the other with a quick gasp of gratitude. And then, to Abel’s immense amazement and alarm, he recognised in the sailor lad his young mistress of Grey House.

She told him she was going to embark that night for South America, in order to evade certain importunate creditors, and that it was of the utmost importance that the disguise should be maintained, of which her unexpected meeting with him had compelled the disclosure.

It was quite unnecessary to appeal to him, by the remembrance of her former kindnesses to him, to assist her in her present plight. Abel Deeds, though not of the gilded-armour-and-embroidered-banner style of chivalry, was the very soul of it, and, moreover, looked upon an importunate creditor very much as a mediæval knight might have done upon a Saracen defending his native soil. He not only willingly promised to keep silence on the adventure of the night, but insisted on turning back and seeing Trenna in safety to her destination, which was the vessel moored just opposite the Doctor's house.

Four weeks had been the period she had imposed upon the faithful Abel as the limit to his silence, and, as may be imagined, he had been greedily impatient for the hour when he was at liberty to tell his tale to 'Mr. Frank.'

The story was strange enough, albeit undoubtedly true, but what struck Frank as most noteworthy was the date of the occurrence. Abel had met Trenna on the same evening on which Mark had had his fancied interview with her brother. The question which now occurred to Frank's mind was, *had* that interview been 'fancy'? He had never believed in Kit's ghost, but now he began to disbelieve in his having been in a position to be a ghost at all. If he was not dead, Kit had escaped by Trenna's connivance, and what was more likely than that the brother and sister should have both come down, though separately, in order to avoid suspicion, to a small and out-of-the-way port like Mogadion in order to leave the country? That there was the most urgent necessity for secrecy was evident from the fact of Trenna's disguise. However desirous of

avoiding recognition from her old friends, she would never have put on male attire for any such purpose. While, on the other hand, if she had wished to go abroad upon her own account, she would scarcely have selected Mogadion as the place of departure. Again, it would have been curious that she should have selected Rio, where she had no belongings nor any known attraction, for her future home; whereas, if Kit had accompanied her, it was explicable enough, since, once in South America, the convict would be safe. How they had known of the ship's being in the harbour, how they had made arrangements for their passage, or where they had procured the necessary funds, remained, of course, and might ever remain, a matter of conjecture. But Trenna's devotion and Kit's cleverness would account for a good deal.

What was the chief puzzle, however, was how the authorities at Dartmoor had been deceived, if they *had* been deceived, as to Kit's decease; and this point, at all events, Frank Meade was resolved to unravel. The more he thought of the whole matter, the more he was convinced that Kit was in the land of the living, and, not being dead, it was natural that he sometimes thought of him with exceeding bitterness. On one occasion he even said to himself, in reference to that confession of Kit's under the Castle rocks, 'He has not yet come to the end of his tether. The foul fiend was not to have him *per* agreement for the next year or so.'

He was immensely interested in the whole question for its own sake, but his main and ulterior object was of course to open Mark's eyes. If he could prove Kit to be alive, that

‘warning from the dead’ would not only lose its efficacy, but must needs partake of the nature of an imposture, and, if Mark could be convinced that Kit had deceived him, the whole fabric of his influence over him would topple to its fall.

For the present, however, Frank enjoined silence upon Abel Deeds, and kept the entire matter locked up in his own heart. If once he gave expression to his suspicions they would fly far and wide, he knew, like thistle-down, and it was essential that Mark should hear nothing of them till they should take the shape of conviction. One person, indeed, Mr. Penryn, on account of his connection with the gaol chaplain, Frank was compelled to take into his confidence, but it was necessary that his revelation, even to the Rector, should be delayed a little for a certain reason.

CHAPTER LII.

MRS. MORTON.

AMONG the patients that Mr. Frank Meade, F.R.C.S., had of his own, chanced to be one Mrs. Morton, whose husband had taken a house for a few weeks in the neighbourhood of Mogadion, though at the distance of some miles from it. This lady was a very pretty and interesting bride, and it was a great annoyance to Mr. Morton, who knew the neighbourhood, that the place he had fixed upon without consulting her, and as 'a surprise' for their honeymoon, in the midst of so many

charming walks and drives, should have been a comparative failure from her inability to enjoy them. She had sprained her ankle on the first day of her arrival, and had never left the house. The case was curious, for though she professed herself to be in some pain, and quite unable to move, there were no external symptoms of any mischief. Mr. Morton, who was much her senior, and passionately devoted to her, was greatly concerned about this ailment; and Frank had promised him, though the patient expressed herself so strongly opposed to it, that if the matter was not set right by a certain date he would call in another opinion, and in the meantime would pay the patient a daily visit. A sprained ankle is a small thing—and Mrs. Morton's ankle was a very small thing—but there were circumstances in the case which, independent of the youth and

beauty of the sufferer, and even of her confidence in his professional skill, made it a very interesting one to her medical adviser. Upon his first being called in to Mrs. Morton he was struck by a very extraordinary resemblance she bore to the little girl whose life, as has been mentioned, he had in vain attempted to save in the London hospital, and to whom, in fact, he had sacrificed his health. The child in question, however, being of humble rank, and very unlikely to be connected with a lady of his new patient's social position, he had endeavoured to dismiss the matter from his mind as being a mere coincidence. Nevertheless, the more he saw of Mrs. Morton the more the resemblance grew upon him, and on one occasion, when they happened to be alone together, he ventured to allude to the subject. 'I once had a little patient at my hospital in

London,' he said, 'of whom you remind me exceedingly.'

'What!' she cried, 'is it possible that you are the Mr. Meade who attended "little Alice"? (So she had been called in the ward, where she was a great favourite, and by that name mentioned in the papers, for the case had been quite a *cause célèbre* in the medical world.)

'It was I who attended her,' he answered modestly, 'though as it turned out, poor child, to very little purpose.'

'But with consequences to yourself, as I understood,' she put in, in a trembling voice, 'of a very serious kind.'

'Oh, I am getting better of all that,' he answered, smiling.

But she did not seem to hear him. The colour had fled from her face, and she had become extremely agitated.

‘Mr. Meade,’ she said, ‘that was my sister ! You may well look astonished. It strikes you, no doubt, as strange that any relation of mine should have been so poor and so neglected.’

Here the tears came into her eyes ; and it was with eager haste that the young doctor began to utter some commonplaces about an hospital being the very best place, whether for rich or poor, for a patient to receive care and attention.

She waved her hand impatiently as if to dismiss such arguments. ‘I was poor myself at that time,’ she said. ‘Up to the day my good husband married me I was quite a poor girl. I am not ashamed of *that*.’

She hesitated. The young doctor’s face was an expressive one, though he had learnt in the practice of his profession to school it. She

read in it the deduction he had drawn, and the colour flew to her cheeks.

‘And whatever I may have been,’ she added with vehemence, ‘I have no secrets from my husband.’

‘Indeed, madam,’ said Frank, earnestly, ‘I have never supposed it.’

‘No ; you do good to your fellow-creatures ; you are not a man who presupposes evil of all womankind,’ she continued rapidly ; ‘and you are a gentleman, I am sure. Though my husband knows my former humble position, and everything connected with it, I have—being a woman,’ here she smiled like an angel, ‘some foolish pride. I do not wish others to know my past.’

‘No human being will hear one word of it through me, madam.’

‘I do not fear it. If I did, I should still

not regret having made you the confession. I owed it to you for my dead sister's sake.'

The young doctor made haste to dismiss the subject. There was no further allusion to it on either side, but from henceforth he took a great interest in his patient, while she, on her part, seemed to reciprocate it, since she talked to him unreservedly upon his own position and prospects, and even drew from him, with womanly touch, how matters stood with him in connection with Maud, and friends at the Knoll. This last information made her look so unaccountably grave that, if Frank had been ever so little of a coxcomb, he might have flattered himself that she was jealous of his intended. But the attachment between the young doctor and his patient, though it was very genuine, was quite Platonic. What was curious, and exhibited a power of the emotions

over the muscles not generally admitted, as soon as Mrs. Morton understood that Frank wanted to get away to Dartmoor (for he actually made her the repository of that dead secret), her ankle began to grow stronger, and he found himself able to undertake the expedition at an earlier date than he had fixed for it.

His first step was to reveal what Abel Deeds had told him to the Rector, who at once expressed his conviction that there was something amiss in that story of Kit's death and burial. 'My opinion of Christopher Garston, as you know, Frank, was never a good one. With all his cleverness and good looks, that man was morally a "Clafhorer."'

'That sounds very bad,' said Frank, who was under the disadvantage of not understanding the old Cornish tongue.

“ ‘Clafhorer ’ means “leper, ” explained the Rector ; ‘ that young man was a very bad lot, and I shall not be surprised at anything that comes out against him.’ ”

Instead of going his usual round among his patients, Frank started the next morning with Mr. Penryn for the convict prison.

‘ In no habitable part of Great Britain,’ writes one who had good reason for his statement, having himself ‘ worked out his time ’ there, ‘ is the severity of winter felt more than at Dartmoor. Rain is thought nothing of, as it mostly rains or drizzles, but the thick fogs soak through everything.’ Though the winter had not set in when Frank and the Rector visited the place, the fogs had. They had a weird and desolate drive from the railway station over the moor, where the mist lay so thick that they came upon the picket of the civil

guard, armed with rifle and bayonet, who form a cordon round the gaol, before the gloomy pile itself loomed up before them. 'What a place,' was the secret thought of both of them, 'for a man of Christopher Garston's temperament to have been immured, and what desperate plan would he not have been capable of adopting to escape from it?'

The gaol chaplain received them with cordiality, and showed them over the dread domain. They saw the cell in which Kit had been confined, with its narrow window of rough glass, through which but a strip of dull sky was visible; its rude flat table, its narrow shelf and dreary fittings—a melancholy cage, indeed, for such a song-bird. Then they were introduced to the infirmary, where he had occupied a double-bedded room. His companion had been a brother of one of the

warders, himself employed in the prison, but admitted as a patient by favour, who had died within a day or two of Kit himself. The warder had since left the prison, and there was none to speak with much personal knowledge of Kit's last hours. The chaplain had not been called in to him, as he had died suddenly in the night, and the doctor who had attended him was a stranger, who had acted as the *locum tenens* of the ordinary surgeon, who had been away upon his holiday.

This information all tended to confirm the visitors' suspicions, which, when they had heard all he had to say, they communicated to their host, the chaplain. That gentleman, though by no means staggered by their story—he was in the habit of receiving such amazing revelations from the members of his tainted flock that a mild surprise was the most of which his

nature was now capable—thought it of sufficient importance to lay before the Governor, to whom they were in consequence introduced. He listened to their narrative with great politeness, but with a somewhat amused expression of countenance. There were not many subjects open to humorous treatment at Dartmoor, but any notion that ‘our system’ could be in fault, or that the authorities could be deceived, was always a good joke.

Prisoners sometimes expired, he allowed, at Dartmoor before their sentences did, but none ever left the place alive before the proper time. Such an incident was contrary to experience, common-sense, and even possibility. However, since the ‘system’ had been impugned, it was necessary to establish its infallibility. His position invested him with special powers ; he could have a convict’s body

exhumed without application to the Home Secretary. If the remains of 18,422 (the number which had sufficed poor Kit for name while an inmate of the prison) should be found where they were supposed to be, and identified, he concluded that Mr. Penryn and his young friend would acknowledge their suspicions to be unfounded ; but to that end they must accept his hospitality for the night.

To this, of course, they consented ; and the next morning, accompanied by certain officials, all repaired to the little churchyard. A small headstone, ordered by Trenna, was being prepared by the village stone-mason for her brother's grave, but at present it lay bare and naked enough, without even the turf upon it. It was but the work of a few minutes to dig down through the soft earth to the deal coffin, to open which as little time sufficed. Its con-

tents, instead of 'the house not built with hands' which ought to have been found there, were the materials for an actual dwelling-house—bricks and plaster. The general amazement was pretty considerable, but that of the Governor bordered on the sublime.

'Why, goodness gracious!' he exclaimed.
'Our whole system has broken down!'

And so it had. On a searching inquiry, the facts of Kit's escape—which it is fair (to the system) to add had been greatly aided by circumstances—were as follows: The warder of the infirmary had been bribed. When his brother died he had called in the *locum tenens* of the prison surgeon, who knew none of its inmates, and to whom the deceased was described as Christopher Garston, in whose name the certificate of death was duly made out. For the interment, a coffin and certain brickbats

were at once provided, but the body was retained to play another part. The regular prison surgeon, who was to return next day to his duties, of course made no difficulty in giving a certificate of death in the name of the warder's brother ; while No. 18,422 was already struck off the prison roll.

Though not easy, it therefore became not impossible to smuggle Kit out of the gaol ; and, without doubt, this had been effected. Where the money had come from to accomplish all these objects no one knew ; but that money had done it, aided by assistance from without, was certain. It is possible that the Cook's Creek Mine, though it did not turn out satisfactorily to the shareholders, had been worked to a profit by its enterprising originator ; or perhaps some dealer in the precious metals, less fortunate than Mr. Flesker (who did get

back his diamond), had contributed to Kit's private stores. The Rio ship had been an ordinary trader, the captain of which had been induced by certain golden arguments to take two brothers as passengers in lieu of part of his freight.

All this was in time made as clear as daylight to every one but the person whom it was most important to convince. The belief of a lifetime was not to be shaken by a fact or two, adduced, also, by persons who had a personal interest in their acceptance. Does a mother believe in her darling's guilt because the world does so, or a miserable minority of it—say twelve—have happened to convict him? And Mark's love for Kit, if not equal to that of a mother for her offspring, surpassed that of brother for brother. The sense, too, of loving service done, always strong in grateful hearts,

no doubt helped to close his ears against the voice of reason. Lastly, he clung to the belief that Kit's affection for him had, in truth, survived death itself; and that, no matter what story might be devised to take from him that comfort, he had, indeed, beheld his old friend in the spirit, and listened to his voice from beyond the grave.

Mr. Penryn, indeed, took another view of the position. If, he said, we find so many persons who pretend to believe that they have seen a ghost, still sticking to their story, in the teeth both of arguments and ridicule, how much more was it to be expected that a man who really believed he had seen one should refuse to be convinced to the contrary?

But the Rector had no matrimonial intentions to which Mark's scepticism presented the only obstacle, and could therefore afford to be

philosophic ; while Mr. Frank Meade could not. That his marriage would take place, notwithstanding Mark's continued opposition, was probable enough ; but, in that case, it would be a very different affair from what both Maud and himself had pictured. As matters stood, its accomplishment bade fair to break up the little household at the Knoll altogether.

The circumstances, so every way painful and peculiar, were, of course, kept to themselves as much as possible ; but Mrs. Morton was one of the few persons to whom Frank unreservedly confided them. It is difficult for a man to decline the proffered sympathy of a pretty and interesting young woman in any case, but the tie of her dead sister bound her and Frank together far closer than any new-made friendship could have done. Moreover,

the period of Mrs. Morton's sojourn in the neighbourhood of Mogadion was coming to an end, and the sense of parting, perhaps, drew her nearer to him. She was no longer his patient, though, strange to say, the recovery of her health did not result in those walks abroad to which her husband looked forward; but on the day before her departure he came to pay her a farewell visit.

This proved to be the occasion of a very strange communication, and also of a revolution of a surprising nature in his own affairs.

‘Mr. Meade,’ she said, ‘if this were not the last time we were to meet—in all probability for ever—perhaps I should hesitate to do what I am about to do, even for your sake. It will cost me something, but it will cost me less than if you knew what it cost me. Therefore, I must beg of you—no matter what surprise

you may feel at what I have to say to you—that you will ask me no questions.’

Frank’s surprise was certainly very considerable, but he bowed respectful acquiescence.

‘Here is a letter,’ she went on, ‘which, without saying one more word than is necessary to account for your possession of it, I authorise you to give to the person to whom it is addressed.’

He took the letter, which, to his amazement, he saw was addressed to Mark Medway.

‘But, my dear madam,’ he remonstrated, ‘if this, as I venture to conclude, has any reference to myself or my own affairs, I must needs say that in Mark’s present state of mind——’

She put up her hand to stop him. ‘You are about to say, no doubt, that any interposi-

tion on the part of a stranger on your behalf cannot possibly affect Mr. Medway except for ill. You are mistaken there; it will affect him and your own interests very much, and for good. It may be necessary, perhaps, to state'—here her voice faltered, and the tears came suddenly into her eyes—'that I am not altogether a stranger to your friend. To ask more of me in the way of explanation would be a breach of the promise you have tacitly given me.'

'Then I will say no more, madam, but will gratefully do your bidding,' said Frank, gently. 'Even if nothing should come of it, I shall never forget your generous intention.'

'And while the memory of my little sister abides with me, Mr. Meade, I shall never forget *you* and what you did for her. It is curious,' she added, with a faint smile, 'but though you

will reap the benefit of it, you will never know what I have done for you.'

In a few minutes afterwards Frank had taken his leave and turned his horse's head (well did that steed know his road by this time) to the Knoll. Upon the way, as it happened, he met Mark, taking one of his solitary walks. He would, perhaps, have passed the other without speaking to him—so far had the gulf widened between them—had not Frank stopped him to give him Mrs. Morton's letter.

Mark looked at the superscription, started, turned very red, and then asked shortly, 'Who gave you this?'

'The writer,' answered Frank, quietly. Instinct, or perhaps mere curiosity, prompted him to check his horse, and remain where he was. It was possible, moreover, that some answer might be intrusted to him. Mark

became at once too intensely absorbed in the contents of the letter to know whether the other had gone on or still stood there. ‘Dear Mr. Medway,’ it ran, ‘I little thought that I should ever give you the pain of once more receiving any communication from my hand. It is not for my own sake that I address you, but for yours; to save you from the persistence in a great wrong to one of the best and worthiest of men, and to open your eyes, since no one else can do it, as regards——’ (here there was an erasure; was it possible she had written ‘the worst,’ and that some tender remembrance of the past had caused her to blot it out?) ‘as regards another man. In your last letter to me, full of unmerited gentleness and forbearance towards myself, you expressed yourself with the utmost bitterness and indignation against a certain person, but for whom, as you

imagined, I might have been worthy of your love. Against that person (think of what it costs me to write all this, and then judge whether aught of it can be less than truth itself?), against that person I may have wrongs to urge, but not the wrong you imputed to him. Instead of his name put that of Christopher Garston, and the indignation you have expressed will be just. My lot is a happy one, blessed beyond all hope or merit, as the bearer of this note will tell you ; but it is no thanks to Christopher Garston, by whom my young life was cankered in the bud, that I am not a sinner and a castaway. If I ever read your heart aright I am sure of these two things—first, that after reading this, written, as it seems to me, with my life's blood, you will destroy it; secondly, that you will take to your heart the man who gives it you, and keep him

there to fill the place from which these words of mine will have cast out an unworthy tenant. I am giving you terrible pain, I know, for I can feel for you. There was a time, Heaven knows, when Christopher Garston was all in all to *me*.'

There was nothing more—not even a signature.

Mark looked up with a sigh that seemed to come from his very soul, and saw Frank standing near, his bridle under his arm, and his horse cropping the grass.

‘Who is she?’

The words were simple enough, but the tone in which they were uttered conveyed another meaning. Frank understood at once that what the other meant was, ‘Who is she *now*?’

When he had told him all he knew of her,

Mark asked, with the red in his cheek, whether she had been long in her present place of residence.

‘Three months. She has had a sprained ankle, which confined her to the house,’ he answered, replying to the other’s thought, ‘Why have I not seen her?’

The explanation of poor Mrs. Morton’s complaint was now plain enough. She had had her reasons for keeping within doors. ‘She leaves this neighbourhood to-morrow,’ continued Frank, significantly.

Mark sighed again, but this time there was relief, as well as regret, in it.

‘Better so,’ he murmured. Then he held out his hand. ‘Frank, I have been very wrong.’

‘Say wronged, Mark,’ was the grave rejoinder.

‘Hush, hush ; you will forgive me, I know, but do not let your generosity stop there. I thought him dead. He *is* dead to me now ; let him be dead to you, and, being so, speak no ill of him.’

‘I never will, Mark. Let us forget him.’

‘Forget him? That I can never do. Poor Kit : poor Kit.’

And for the first time in his life Frank beheld his friend in tears.

And both men kept their words. From that day Christopher Garston was but a memory.

It was understood at the Knoll that there were no questions to be asked concerning Mark’s change of opinion. The ladies were too glad to find that it *had* changed to be curious as to the means whereby the alteration had been brought about. Scarcely Frank himself was more im-

patient for his marriage-day than Mark now became to witness it. It seemed that he could never do enough in the way of friendship and brotherly love to make up for his recent antagonism.

In time—though it took a long time—Mark resumed his old ways and work; and it is thought not impossible that by the time he is a great-uncle he will be in a position to publish the first volume of his county history. The parallel there ceases, for the work being in quarto, the phrase ‘Welcome, little stranger,’ would be not altogether appropriate to its appearance. From this delicate allusion it will have been manifest that Frank and Maud were duly united. How their wedding-day, though long fixed, should have been known so far away they could never discover; it was only one more mystery added to many in connection with the persons concerned; but on that very

morning the last missive Maud Medway received in her maiden name was a telegram from Valparaiso.

‘All happiness attend you both. We are as you would wish us to be. Farewell. TRENNA.’

From which it was gathered (I trust rightly) that in another clime, and under other circumstances, Kit is leading a new life, and doing well.

THE END.

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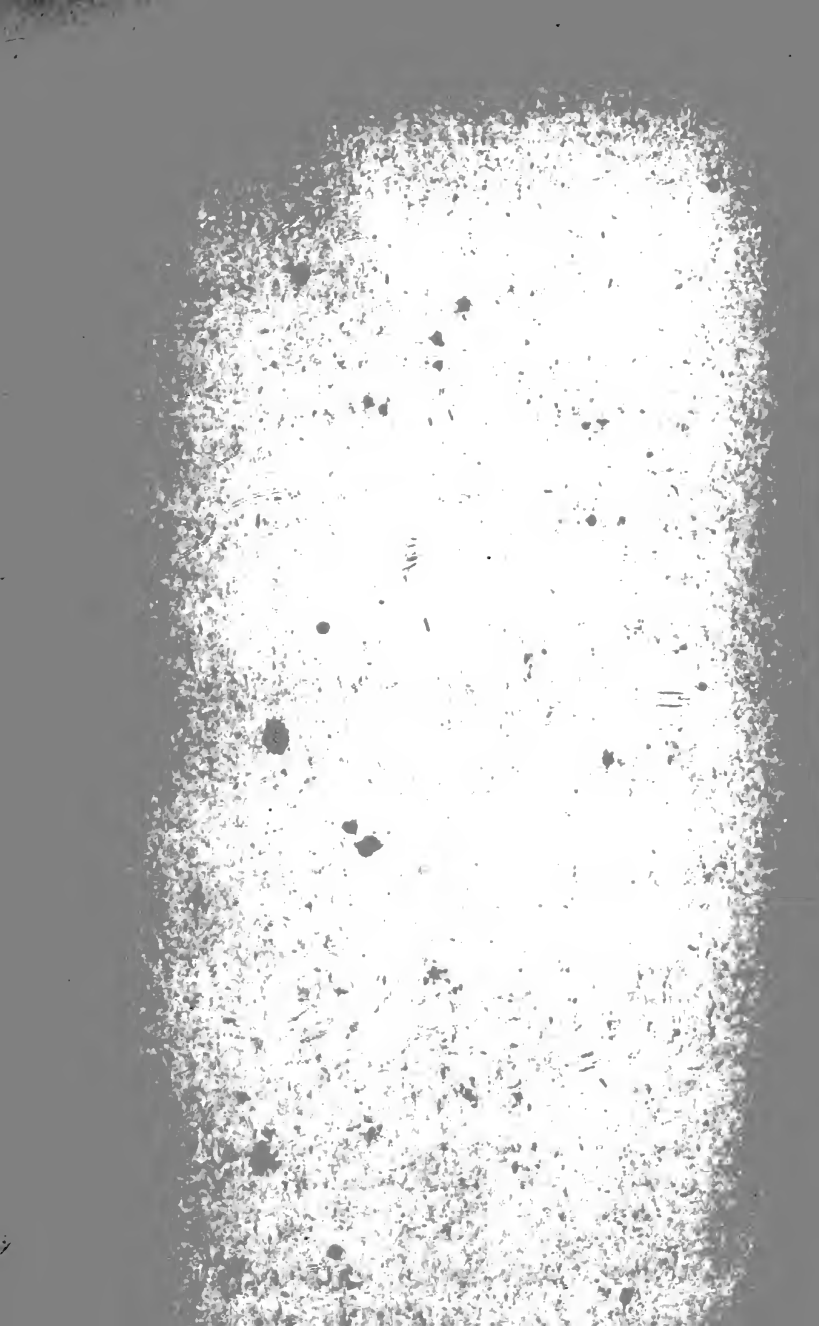
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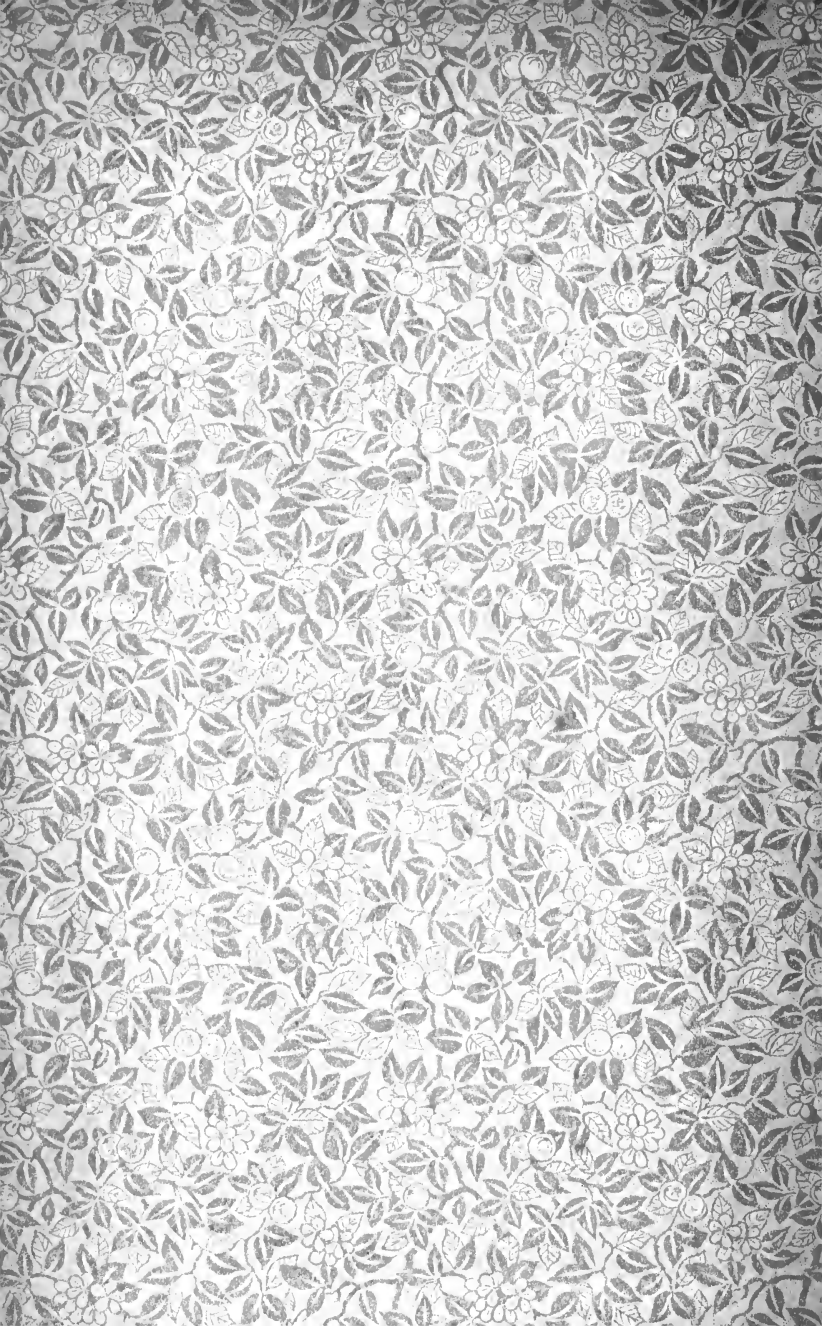
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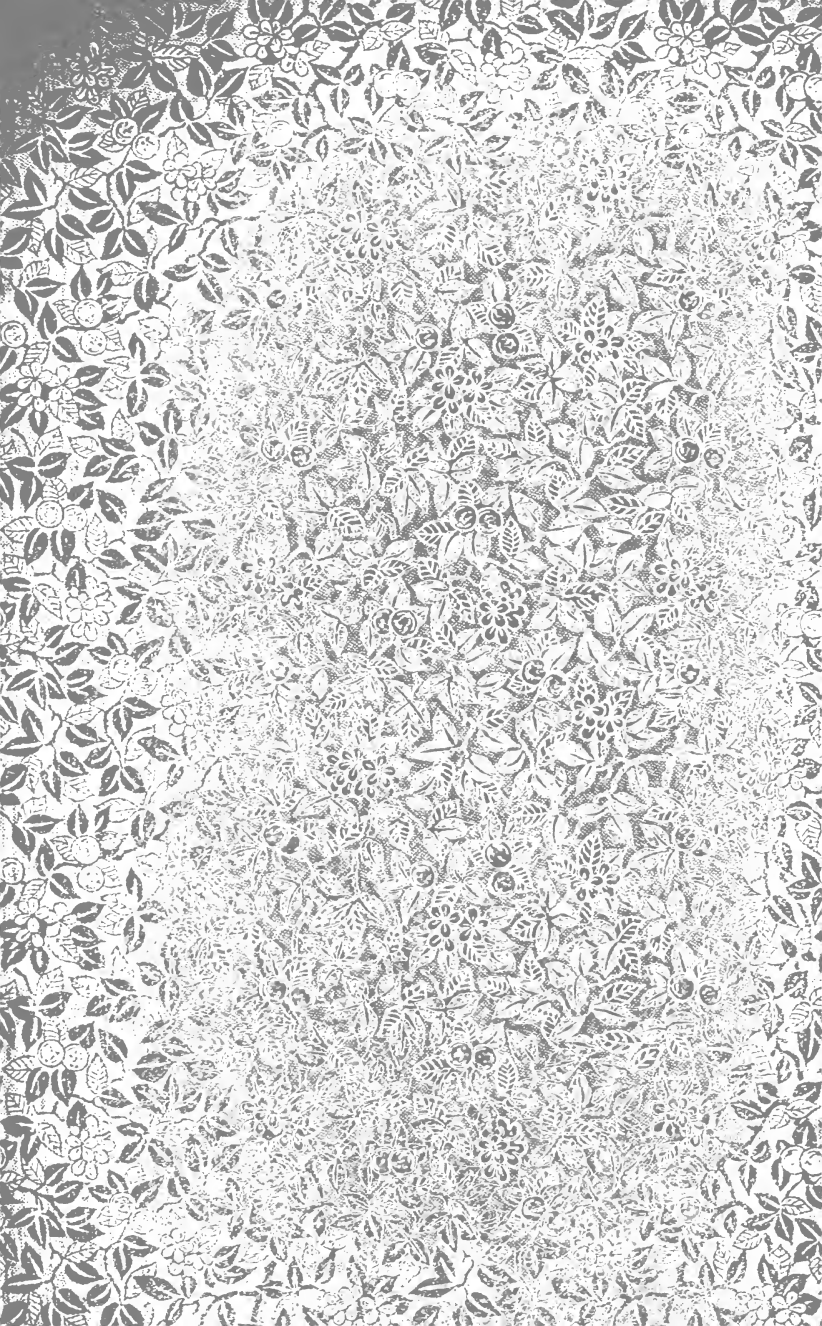
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